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A BITTER MISTAKE; OR, A YOUNG GIRL'S FOLLY.

BY AGNES MARY SHELTON.



THE GATE WAS REACHED, THE LAST GOOD-BY WAS SAID.

A Bitter Mistake;

OR,

A YOUNG GIRL'S FOLLY.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ECCENTRIC BOARDER.

THERE was certainly some excuse for the cloud of discontent which overshadowed the face of Penelope Heathcote. Although the season was spring, a chilliness in the air made her shiver, and a drizzling rain caused all objects in the streets to assume the dejected appearance common to things, animate and inanimate, on a rainy day in Camden. Moreover, the large but not scrupulously clean kitchen in which she stood, with the handful of fire in the rusty stove and the square of torn carpet in the center of its flooring, forcibly reminded her of the poverty which had been her portion for so many years; but for all that she had not yet learnt to endure the latter with equanimity.

The tone of Penelope's mind was generally in indignant protest against Fate; and as she carefully smoothed the creases out of her brother Bertrand's only coat—a garment that had seen much service—she looked so grim that the little maid of all-work who waited on the Heathcotes and their boarders opined that "missis was in one of her tempers," and following the teachings of experience, was careful not to intrude upon her notice.

Penelope was a tall, straight, rather masculine-looking woman of nine and twenty, with an aquiline nose, thin compressed lips, thick black brows, almost meeting above eyes of a curious reddish-brown hue, which, when she was angry, seemed to emit sparks of fire; but, when she smiled, danced with a vivacity which illumined her whole countenance. Her coarse, dark hair was drawn back from her forehead, and fastened into an untidy knot at the back of her head, while the defects of her angular figure were rendered more apparent by the ill-fitting calico wrapper she wore.

Penelope made no attempt at improving appearances, either in herself, her dress, or her surroundings.

"Milly, have you taken up Mr. Ellerton's tea?" she asked, sharply, breaking the long silence.

"Yes, Miss Penelope, more than half an hour ago."

"Did he seem better than he was this morning?"

"He looked awful bad," answered Milly, pausing in her task of clearing up the kitchen, in order to give emphasis and solemnity to her words. "He was sitting in his arm-chair a-trembling and shivering with cold, though he was close to the fire, and he hadn't touched no dinner, nor taken his medicine. I've been thinking, Miss Penelope, the old gent may not get over this stretch."

Before her mistress could reply, the bell of a room above rung violently, and Miss Heathcote, well accustomed to similar impatient summonses, quitted the precincts dedicated to domestic duties, and ascended to the sitting-room.

"You know I hate to sit moping here all alone!" exclaimed her brother, peevishly, as she entered. "What have you been doing?"

"Trying to make you look a little more presentable when next you dine with your patron, Mr. Harbury," she answered; "but this coat is so shabby it defies all my efforts at improvement."

"And that fellow, Fitwell, positively refuses to make another until I settle his account," observed Bertrand, moodily. "But it is of no great consequence, for inasmuch as I have quarreled with my patron, as you term him, it is not likely that I shall again be invited to partake of his hospitality."

"Quarreled! Oh, Bertrand, how could you be so foolish? I thought Mr. Harbury had

commissioned you to paint him another picture."

"I believe there was some half-promise of the sort; but the man was so dictatorial, besides being niggardly, that I could bear his whims no longer."

"Then how are we to live?" questioned Penelope, sternly. "You know he has always given a fair price for any picture that took his fancy; and you know how difficult it is to please the regular dealers, not to mention the hard bargains they always drive. What do you mean to do, Bertrand?"

"I have not yet had time to give the matter a thought," he rejoined, affecting an air of indifference.

"Will you give drawing lessons if I can find you pupils, Bertrand?"

"Certainly not. I should not have patience to direct and lecture a set of tiresome school-boys who have no taste for art, and girls are not much better. What a pity it is that there should be any necessity for working! Labor destroys all enjoyment of life, and this perpetual obligation of studying ways and means to provide bread and butter weighs down one's spirits to a point that is most often too heavy to bear up under."

"Yet such will be our destiny to the weary end," said Penelope, frowning at once at her brother's speech, and grieving at the unpromising prospects which now presented themselves to her.

"Perhaps not; we might become possessed of a fortune; in which case I would have a luxurious home, replete with every comfort and attraction wealth could furnish; while you would marry Walter Maxwell, and, of course, be happy ever after."

A cold, half-sneering smile curled on his sister's lip as she answered, "I am afraid that while you are building castles in the air Walter and I must grow old and gray. Our engagement has already lasted several years, and we are prematurely aged by trouble and anxiety. Only today I noticed a few silver threads in my hair; and when I remember that I shall soon be thirty years of age, it seems as if I were even now too old for love, hope, or happiness."

"You are, no doubt, losing fast all your good looks," observed Bertrand, with that brutal candor brothers sometimes affect. "If Walter were to cry off, one could scarcely blame him. I warned you long ago that a lengthy engagement is risky for a man, and suicidal for a woman. One or the other is sure to grow tired of waiting, and only quarrel and part when it is too late to form new ties."

"What could we do?" she asked, after a gloomy, mental survey of this disagreeable picture. "You know Walter has been unfortunate in business, and was glad to receive a clerkship of six hundred a year. Would you have me marry upon that?"

"Certainly not," was his bitter answer; "you would be committing a folly which is generally punished more severely than a crime. In your case, Poverty would wield the scourge to frighten away Cupid. Now if you had only had the good luck to attract some rich man's fancy when you were young, how different things might now be with us both!"

"I should not have loved him so well as Walter."

"That matters little. I would marry one of the Gorgons if she possessed a comfortable independence; and even in your case I believe that common sense in such an emergency would have caused you to give up the chance of love in a cottage for a more brilliant match. But, unfortunately, you have never been tempted in that direction."

Penelope's eyes flashed fire. Though her faults were many, she was a woman of strong affections, and had a capability for loving that her brother did not possess. She was slavishly faithful to Walter Maxwell, and would not have deserted him to become the sharer of a throne. Though stung for the moment, she was too much accustomed to her brother's taunting speeches to attempt recrimination; so

after a short pause, she adroitly changed the subject of conversation.

"Old Mr. Ellerton seems very ill, Bertrand."

"What, our first floor—the mysterious man, who came three months ago, paid in advance, gave no references, and seems to have no friends? Well, Pen, if he is going to die, perhaps he will first make a will in our favor."

The lady tossed her head contemptuously.

"We should not be much the gainers. He is poorer than we are, with his shabby clothes and frugal meals, for which he daily doles out a few cents to Milly, giving her strict injunctions to make no extravagant purchases. Indeed, I have been anxious to speak to you on the matter, and to ask your advice. Suppose the old man were to be laid up with a long illness, which terminated fatally, and did not leave enough money to pay all the expenses, should we not be in an awkward position?"

Bertrand stroked his long, fair mustache meditatively, and assumed a thoughtful expression which, by so doing, made his resemblance to his sister, whose junior he was by several years, all the more striking. His hair was several shades lighter, his skin paler, being almost cadaverous in hue; but the flickering eyes beneath their beetling brows, the long, thin mouth, and well-shaped nose and chin, were like Penelope's.

"As you say, it might be awkward," he assented, at length; "yet the old fellow, so far, has paid regularly, so I am loth to give him notice. Shall I go up-stairs and pay him a visit? I might manage to gain some knowledge of his pecuniary affairs, or at least find out whether he has any friends to whom we could apply in case of need."

"Just what I was about to suggest, Bertrand. He surely cannot be quite alone in the world."

"We must endeavor to find that out; your hints have alarmed me. We must not allow ourselves to be put to the trouble and expense of nursing a sick pauper; so if there is any chance of our being out of pocket by Mr. Ellerton, he will have to go."

Saying which, Bertrand arose from the couch with an air of decision, which was in striking contrast to his former languor. The prospect of his boarder falling into arrears, perhaps dying on the premises, dispelled his dreamy indolence, and startled him into vigorous action.

Bertrand Heathcote was not disturbed by scrupulousness. He was full of that self love which rarely or never regards the claims of others. What mattered it to him how long or how much others might suffer, provided he himself escaped annoyance and injury.

He went up the narrow staircase, and knocked at the door of Mr. Ellerton's room.

It was the first-floor front, and for years had been let by the Heathcotes to eligible single gentlemen, whose payments were found convenient in assisting to pay the rent of the small, dingy house in Budd street, Camden.

A high-toned, quavering voice bade him enter.

The old man had drawn his chair close to the fire, and the ruddy blaze shone full upon his meager form, which was wrapped in a faded dressing-gown; upon his wizened, sharp-featured face, long white hair, which nearly reached his shoulders, and into his wandering eyes of lightest blue. A gray, unkempt beard, hanging down upon his breast, gave him a venerable, though somewhat weird, appearance. In his younger days he might have been tall of stature; but he was now so bent by age and ill-health, that it seemed an effort to raise his head and look with inquiring scrutiny upon his visitor.

"Good-evening, Mr. Ellerton!" began Bertrand, slightly disconcerted by his earnest gaze. "My sister tells me you are unwell, and—"

"Ah, yes, Mr. Heathcote; to be sure! I did not recognize you at once, for my eyes are failing, though my hearing is as good as ever. So you came to ask after my health? That is

failing, too. I am not the same man I was even six months ago. You must excuse me for not being in the humor to entertain visitors."

Bertrand, in no way discomfited by this speech, sat down, uninvited, and glanced furtively round the room, thinking he might thereby discover some indication of his boarder's pecuniary condition. A sea-chest, which seemed to have seen rough service, and a battered valise stood together near the window; but their contents were invisible, and no other vestige of Mr. Ellerton's personal property rewarded his scrutiny.

"You should have medical advice, sir, from some clever practitioner," he recommenced, blandly. "There is a doctor living in this very street. You may have noticed the red lamp over his door. I can highly recommend him."

"Pooh!—nonsense! I want no long doctor's bills! The bottle of medicine Milly brings me from the druggist round the corner is just as efficacious, I dare say, as if it were prescribed by a regular physician, while it saves at least a dollar."

"But for the satisfaction of your friends?"

"Friends! Why, I have none! I am an old man, and have outlived all that were worthy of the name. I have been absent from America nearly fifty years, Mr. Heathcote. I have traveled half over the world, seen many strange sights, and have had all sorts of curious adventures. As you may imagine, I now find myself quite a stranger in my own country."

"Yes, indeed; that is a long period to be a wanderer," said Bertrand, hoping to win his way by degrees into the old man's confidence. "You must have undergone many vicissitudes."

"You may well say so. Why, sir, I was in the wilds of Australia when fortunes were made in a week, and when the man who often arrived a beggar left and went home, before many years, a millionaire. Not that I was so fortunate myself, though at one time I had no reason to complain; but if I won at one time, I lost at another, and this went on year after year, until, tired of it, I went to Brazil to try my luck there."

"And there?" questioned Bertrand, eagerly.

"I did well—very well; but I placed too much confidence in my partner, who turned out a rogue and a cheat. I quarreled with him, and grew tired of the country; so off I was again, and after much travelling by sea and land, once more put fortune to the test at the African diamond fields."

"Where you were successful, I hope?" said Bertrand, interrogatively.

"Ah, there is nothing like enterprise!" was Mr. Ellerton's rather evasive answer. "It deserves success. Men who pass their lives at home labor incessantly, and are only just able to keep the wolf from the door. The digger is always sustained by the hope of being raised to the pinnacle of his ambition by a lucky chance. If he has patience to wait and work, sooner or later comes his reward."

When Bertrand retired it was with a strong suspicion that his boarder was an eccentric being of miserly habits, who, having amassed wealth, loved to hoard rather than to spend it. From his own account, he was friendless in the world; so who would those hoards ultimately enrich? If any persons, sufficiently alive to their own interests, studied Mr. Ellerton's whims, and ingratiated themselves in his good graces, they might be his heirs, and have a goodly reward for their trouble.

From that day a perceptible change came over the Heathcotes' behavior toward their boarder. They ministered to the old man's wants and wishes with praiseworthy assiduity. Penelope smoothed her ruffled brow as she busied herself in giving his apartment a more comfortable homelike appearance, while her brother would relieve the tedium of illness by half an hour's friendly chat or reading aloud the evening newspaper.

Nor were their efforts altogether unsuccessful.

Mr. Ellerton grew accustomed to their presence, and was inclined to be sociable. Sometimes, however, he would repulse their advances without reason, and would incase himself in an armor of reserve just at the moment they fancied they had secured his favorable regard. He would have fits of distrust which he did not attempt to conceal, and would abruptly interrupt a conversation that was growing confidential with hints as to the propriety of every reasonable man keeping his private affairs locked in his own breast.

Brother and sister would occasionally lose hope, and relax their exertions, when a chance word from Mr. Ellerton would brace them up to fresh endeavors.

CHAPTER II.

ENID'S HOME.

FAR away from muddy Camden, near a small town in the Berkshire hills called Dalebury, stood a low-roofed white house of some pretensions, which was approached by a carriage-drive, and boasted of a well-arranged flower-garden and smoothly-shaven lawn suitable either for lawn-tennis or croquet. This was Sunnymead, the residence of Mrs. Ormesby, widow of the late rector.

One morning she, with her daughter Jessica, lingered at the breakfast-table, though the morning was already far advanced. Mrs. Ormesby was a stately, imperious woman about forty years of age, exhibiting the remains of great beauty, which her daughter had partially inherited. But Jessica would never boast that majestic height and well-developed figure, nor was she possessed of those lustrous orbs and exquisitely-chiseled features which had once caused the fame of her mother to be spread throughout the county.

"Well, Jessica," began the elder lady, as she slowly sipped her chocolate, "you are strangely silent this morning. I expected you would give me a full account of the birthday party yesterday at Mrs. Brooke's, which I was unfortunately prevented from attending in consequence of a wretched headache. Did it go off well?"

"Very well, mamma."

"You danced a great deal, of course, and had agreeable partners?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I suppose Basil Clifford was there, and helped to make the evening pass pleasantly?"

"We danced together once or twice."

"Jessica, do not be provoking," cried the mother, with some irritation. "You give me no particulars when you know how anxious I am."

"Why are you so anxious, dear mamma?" asked the girl, with assumed simplicity.

"That you should one day be Mrs. Basil Clifford, of the Hall," answered Mrs. Ormesby, slowly and impressively. "I have planned for you that future, my child, and I am inclined to fancy that the dictates of your own heart approve my conduct."

A bright blush dyed the girl's face, rising even to her broad, low forehead.

"I fear—I mean I think that will never be," she faltered.

"Why not, Jessica? I am not apt to form plans which are not to be realized. You and Basil were playfellows in childhood, and even then I encouraged him, and smiled to hear him call you his little wife. Since then you have been thrown much together, and I have noticed with pleasure that the childish friendship has suffered no diminution as the years have passed on, but rather has steadily progressed."

"Friendship is not love, mamma," hazarded the girl, timidly.

"With young folks it is hard to say where the line is drawn," remarked Mrs. Ormesby, with a complacent sense of her own sagacity. "Believe, me, my love, I have had some experience in such matters, and do not doubt that the day will come when I can congratulate you on your conquest."

There was a moment's hesitation.

"Perhaps I am mistaken; but sometimes the

fancy crosses my mind that Basil is in love with Enid," replied Jessica.

Mrs. Ormesby gave a little scream of indignation.

"What! in love with that pale-faced, silent, dreamy-eyed child, when he has had the opportunity of seeing, associating and of conversing with you, Jessica?"

"She has greatly improved during the last two years. I have several times lately heard it remarked that there is something in her face more striking than regular beauty. Then that pale golden hair, which gleams in the sunshine like threads of light, and ripples all over her head, defying band or comb to keep it in perfect order, is a great attraction. Indeed, mamma, it is no use shutting our eyes to the fact that Enid is a dangerous rival."

The elder lady remained silent for awhile, evidently in deep meditation. She was anxious that her daughter should marry well, and years ago settled in her own mind that Basil Clifford would be an acceptable son-in-law when Jessica was of an age to marry. He was young, handsome, with a fine estate and an extensive income. Clifford Hall was at no great distance from Sunnymead—in itself a recommendation to a mother in selecting a husband for her only child.

Altogether she had grown so familiar with the idea, and liked the plan so well, that she was resolved not to accept defeat, especially from a girl like Enid Lisle, an orphan niece of her late husband, the rector, to whom he had given a home, after her parents had died of fever within a few days of one another.

"What has given rise to your wild suppositions?" she inquired, after mentally deciding that she would not submit tamely to have her schemes frustrated, but would endeavor to lead Basil and her daughter to that happy future which, unaided by her, they might never reach.

"It is preposterous to think of Enid as mistress of Clifford Hall; and surely Basil has not spoken to you on the subject?"

"Of course not, mamma; and I may be wrong. Yet he seemed so disappointed that you had not allowed her to accept Mrs. Brooke's invitation for last night, and was so eager to know whether he might expect to meet her at the Greys' musical party next week, that I felt sure he prized her society highly."

Mrs. Ormesby gave a sigh of relief.

"Your opinion rests on a poor foundation, my dear," she said, lightly. "You know that some people think Enid has a fine voice, so Basil might look forward with pleasure to an opportunity of hearing her sing at the Greys', without any feeling of which we might disapprove."

She smiled encouragingly at Jessica as she rose from the table, the matutinal meal having now been over some time, and Jessica faintly returned the smile. Yet an inward monitor told her that she was right in her belief, and must relinquish the hope of having her first love-dream realized.

Meanwhile Enid Lisle, unconscious that she had proved such an interesting topic of conversation to the ladies of Sunnymead, had walked briskly down the quiet road leading to Dalebury, in order to execute a commission which Jessica had given her the previous day; to-wit, to order some materials for fancy-work, and to try to match some trimming, when she had leisure; and the young girl, scorning to ask for the use of her aunt's pony-paeton, had set off on her expedition, before either Mrs. Ormesby or her daughter had descended to the breakfast-parlor.

To her it seemed pleasant to have the fresh, cool air playing on her cheeks; to listen to the song of the robin amid the thick green foliage waving overhead. Sometimes a butterfly flitted across her path, or a wild flower of more than ordinary beauty tempted her to gather it.

On reaching town, Enid quickly completed her purchases, and was about to turn her steps homeward, when she noticed Basil Clifford standing by her side.

"I thought I was not mistaken," he exclaimed, joyfully. "You passed Mapleton's while I was buying gloves, and I hurried to overtake you. How fortunate that we should happen to meet!"

She gave him her hand, and for an instant they looked into each other's eyes. In Enid's beamed shy happiness, in Basil's ardent love.

"You are going home, I presume; may I walk with you?" he asked, persuasively; and although the girl was conscious that her aunt would disapprove, she had not the courage to deny his request.

"I was disappointed at not seeing you last night," he said, as they walked on together. "What is the reason you so seldom accompany Jessica into society? Do you dislike parties and dancing?"

"Not in the least. On the contrary, I like them very much; but aunt Ormesby raises many objections. In the first place, she says I am almost too young; next, that my uncle had scruples concerning various amusements, and that, had he lived, he would be sure to have disapproved of my participating too freely in county gayeties. Dear uncle! either living or dead, his wishes are sacred to me, for he was always kind and loving!"

"Mrs. Ormesby is not so conscientious with Jessica," he remarked, rather bitterly.

"It would be unreasonable to expect her to be influenced by my uncle's opinion, since she was only his step-daughter," said Enid, with decision.

"You must not be offended if I ask you a question most young ladies would think impertinent," he began, after a short pause, smiling upon her under his thick mustache. "I should not be so rude, only I perceive your aunt treats you as a child, while I have reasons for wishing you to grow quickly into womanhood. How old are you, Enid?"

"Eighteen on the twenty-first of next October," she answered, demurely.

"And we are now in May. Not much longer than five months to wait before I shall claim a precious gift from Mrs. Ormesby. If she consents to bestow on me the treasure which I crave, I shall come to you for the ratification of the bond, Enid."

He looked down from his stately height on the slight *petite* figure of the girl beside him, who, with her lovely flowing hair and unadorned dress of simple gray, looked even younger than she really was.

They were silent for awhile. Enid's mind was in a sweet tumult, for even her girlish inexperience and simplicity could guess a meaning in the young man's words—words which thrilled her heart with joy; while he, still undecided whether or not the important words should be spoken, walked on beside her, content to watch the color rising on her cheek, and the flickering smile on the sweet sensitive lips, which he took as a token that she understood his allusions, and at least in some measure returned his affection.

"Would it make you very unhappy to leave Sunnymead?" he asked at length.

"Oh, no," she replied, innocently; "for though aunt Ormesby is kind, I often feel I am an intruder in the house where she and Jessica might be happier without my continual presence. It is hard to describe exactly what I mean, but there is no real sympathy between us. Oh, if my own dear mother had but lived, I should have been a happier and better girl."

"Happier, perhaps; I will not hear of your being better. You are quite good enough for this work-a-day world."

"You do not know me thoroughly. I am often willful and obstinate, apt to act upon the impulse of the moment without calculating the consequences of my rash folly; and then, when too late, I abase myself in bitter repentance, making all sorts of good resolutions—resolutions, however, which are unfortunately oftener broken than kept."

"You underrate your own good qualities," he answered, smiling, "and exaggerate your faults. Thoughtless you may be—I, who am

nearly nine years older than you, sometimes do things of which my better judgment disapproves—but I will not believe you are willful and obstinate unless I obtain ocular demonstration of the fact."

She shook her pretty head gravely.

"I can assure you that I am not taking too harsh a view of my failings. Even uncle, dear, indulgent uncle, used to scold me occasionally; and nurse Rachel, who is so very, very old that she remembers my grandmother when she was a little girl, says I am like her both in face and disposition."

"Was your grandmother, then, a very headstrong old lady?" asked Basil, laughing outright.

"She never lived to be old," answered Enid, with a pensive air. "She died of consumption a few years after her marriage, and though she left a kind husband and two little children, she was quite willing to go. Rachel says that she was never the same girl after her parents forbade her to think any more of young Ellerton, but fretted and wasted away, so that her health was quite broken when at last she was persuaded to marry grandfather."

"Who was young Ellerton?" inquired Basil, with but faint interest in this story of probably over fifty years ago, yet liking to hear Enid talk so earnestly.

"He was her father's clerk, and she loved him, though he was very poor, and altogether unsuited to be the husband of a wealthy merchant's daughter. She was wayward and headstrong, refusing to be advised by those who were older and wiser than herself. So her parents sent her for a while to a convent, and her lover emigrated to some outlandish country and was never heard of more."

"Quite a romance of the olden time," smiled Basil. "I wish it had ended more happily."

"So used I to wish; but Rachel says a rebellious spirit is never contented in any condition of life; therefore, things might not have been much better if Enid the first—her name was the same as mine—had been allowed to follow her own inclination."

"Would you, then, Enid, tamely submit to be separated from the man you loved? Nay, you need not answer in words; there is a flash of indignant dissent in your eyes that sufficiently settles the question. May you be as tender and true as your namesake, but far more fortunate; and may the happy man who wins your hand be the possessor of your heart's best love!"

A turn in the road brought Mrs. Ormesby and Jessica in sight. The beauty of the morning had tempted them forth for a constitutional. Jessica looked grave, and the elder lady accosted her niece with an air of frigid displeasure.

"I am surprised, child, to see you out at this hour of the morning when you should be practicing your music and drawing. Pray lose no more time, but hasten home as quickly as you can. I like young persons to be diligent in their studies."

Then, fearing lest Basil might not be inclined to relinquish his position as escort, she added, "I think, Jessica, we will not continue our walk, as I am rather weary; so you and Mr. Clifford can talk over Mrs. Brooke's party while I give Enid directions regarding the employment of her time until luncheon. Come, my love," turning to the latter, "you look warm and tired, and will be glad to walk at a slower pace."

So Mrs. Ormesby enjoyed the satisfaction of watching her pretty daughter laughing and talking gayly as she moved onward beside her companion, who politely exerted himself for her entertainment, though his heart lingered with Enid.

CHAPTER III.

OLD ELLERTON'S HEIRESS.

IN the course of a few weeks, Bertrand Heathcote became quite intimate with his somewhat eccentric boarder. He would sit for hours listening to the old man's rambling con-

versation, which often turned on deeds of past prowess, culminating almost invariably in an encounter with some bushrangers or wild beasts, wherein Mr. Ellerton performed prodigies of valor and put his enemies to flight.

Fortune was at a low ebb in the house in Budd street. Bertrand idled away his hours, producing occasionally a water-color sketch which brought in small gain; while Penelope, always most industrious and energetic, found time to instruct a few pupils in music. Thus they struggled on, managing to make enough to supply their daily wants. But it was a weary, anxious life, and Bertrand had some excuse for his earnest longings after the riches in perspective, which he fancied might one day be the reward of his attention to old Ellerton.

Meanwhile, the invalid rallied considerably—perhaps the extra care and kindness gave fresh vigor to his nearly worn-out frame—and regained a modicum of strength. When the weather was propitious he ventured forth upon long, solitary strolls, refusing all companionship. This was rather annoying to his self-appointed protector, who was jealous lest Mr. Ellerton should make any new acquaintance who might rival him in the old man's favor.

One evening, on paying his usual visit, Bertrand found Mr. Ellerton seated at the table with a desk before him full of papers which he was examining and sorting. He looked more than ordinarily bright and cheerful, and greeted his friend with cordiality.

"Sit down, Mr. Heathcote—sit down; you do not disturb me. I am always glad to see you. I am making the most of my time now that I am comparatively strong and well, settling all my affairs, and seeing that everything is ship-shape and as it should be. This improvement in my health may not last long. What can a man expect who is over seventy years of age, and has led a hard life? Never mind, we shall all take our turn, and now my heart is at ease, for my task is accomplished, and my will has this day been properly signed and attested."

Bertrand flushed with excitement, and listened eagerly for further revelations.

"You may not suppose me to be a wealthy man," continued his companion, "because it is my whim to live quietly, without show or ostentation. Money can do wonders. I love it as a miraculous power that can remove difficulties, and gives us in many cases life's choicest blessings. For me it came too late! How happy a portion of the gold I now possess would have made me years ago, when my frame was strong, and my heart lighter! I could then have had a blissful home, the sweetest and dearest of women for my wife, perhaps children prattling round my knees, to be my pride and solace. For want of money that hope was crushed. I have passed through life alone—a solitary, disappointed man!"

"You can still enjoy the sweets of friendship, sir," observed Bertrand, blandly. "Both my sister and myself have the highest regard for you."

"Thanks, thanks!" he muttered, mechanically.

Then, fumbling in his desk with feeble hands, he brought forth a faded miniature, on which he gazed with evident gratification.

"If many years would roll back into the past, and Enid Vere come to life again in her well-remembered loveliness, I would lay my fortune at her feet, and tell her how I struggled to win the gold which would have purchased her father's consent to our union. Work—good Heavens, how I worked!—although my early efforts at money-making proved futile, and although long before I scored my first success I learned that she was married."

"Women are proverbially fickle. It is strange how often they repay our love with falsehood," observed Bertrand, anxious to appear sympathetic.

The old man turned on him almost fiercely.

"False!—who told you she was false? One might as well suspect an angel of treachery! No; she was cajoled or forced into a marriage

from which her heart revolted. It was no wonder she died so young!"

"She has, then, been dead for many years?"

"Yes, yes; it was the very summer I secured that grant of land from the Mexican Government which proved such a good investment that I saw the announcement in a newspaper that had made its way out to the diggings. Look on her sweet, pure countenance, young man, and never more associate with falsehood the name of Enid Vere!"

Bertrand took the miniature held out to him with some curiosity. It was the likeness of a woman who had inspired this enduring passion of a lifetime. He saw a slender figure, clad in a short-waisted white gown, with a blue scarf thrown lightly around it. The face was refined and delicate, her eyes were pensive, and there was a profusion of light golden hair, arranged in a quaint, old-fashioned style.

Bertrand, who preferred showy, black-eyed beauties, *piquante*, striking, with an expression of pertness rather than melancholy, inwardly marveled at his taste.

"You have now some notion of Enid's beauty in her youth," said Lionel Ellerton, complacently, as he received back his treasure, and carefully deposited it in a drawer of his desk. "It was her farewell gift, and has accompanied me over land and sea. You cannot even guess how I have prized it!"

"You were speaking about business matters," hinted Bertrand, anxious to bring back the discussion to the point whence it had strayed. "Can I be of any service? Have you been well recommended to the lawyer to whom, I presume, has been intrusted the drawing up of your will? Excuse my interference, but I am anxious for your interests, and there are so many rogues in the profession."

"Thank you; I have my own lawyers. When I returned from the Cape I brought a letter of introduction to a respectable firm, whom I authorized to undertake a case which I had much at heart. They have acquitted themselves of their task entirely to my satisfaction, and enabled me to carry out my whim."

This speech sounded somewhat mysterious, and Bertrand waited impatiently for the next.

"There are many charitable institutions I might have benefited," pursued the old man; "but I prefer settling the bulk of my wealth upon one who will cherish my memory with tenderness and gratitude. Two hundred thousand dollars is a large bequest to a person in no way related by blood to the testator; is it not, Mr. Heathcote?"

Bertrand assented, and his heart seemed beating as if it would burst during his brief agony of suspense. The sum mentioned exceeded his wildest calculations; and as Mr. Ellerton had no friends, and did not intend making charitable bequests, surely the future inheritor would be himself rather than Penelope.

"You must understand," continued his companion, with the provoking deliberation, peculiar to age, "that if my relatives were living I should not consider myself justified in making such a will. But I am the last of my race, and free to act according to my pleasure. My heiress will be Enid Lisle, now residing with a Mrs. Ormesby at Sunnymead, near Dalebury, Mass., grand-daughter and only surviving descendant of the woman I loved."

Bertrand had difficulty in preserving an outward appearance of composure. He would have liked to lay violent hands on the venerable graybeard, and accused him of a heartless deception.

"The girl is very young, I am told," pursued the unconscious cause of his disappointment, "and may by chance resemble the sainted lady whose name she bears. My heart yearns toward her."

"I wonder how you got to know of the girl's existence when you had been half a century absent from the United States," said Bertrand, petulantly, for his vexation was too great to

be concealed altogether. "How did you ferret her out?"

"The lawyers managed that matter for me. I commissioned them to spare no expense in making inquiries, although all was to be done quietly and without publicity. Of course, it was a work of time, for many changes had taken place—marriages, deaths, and removals complicated affairs, and raised difficulties. Finally, however, they were successful in their quest, and to day the document was signed that makes the second Enid my heiress."

"Is she to be made aware of her good luck?" inquired Bertrand, moodily.

Mr. Ellerton pondered before answering.

"Well, no, I think not; when I am gone it will be time enough. She may not resemble my lost love in face or character, so it would be a disappointment if we met, and I would not like to disturb the portrait I have formed of her in my imagination. Unless my plans are somehow altered, I do not mean to see her; but I have written a letter which will be forwarded, when the proper hour arrives, by those who will inform her of my death and of the will I have made in her favor."

There was silence for a moment; the aged man had an opportunity to brood over his own thoughts; but suddenly he burst out into a loud, triumphant laugh.

"Ha, ha! It is amusing to reflect that old Vere, who was too proud to let me marry his daughter, died a ruined bankrupt; while the last of his line will wear diamonds a duchess might envy, the gift of poor Lionel Ellerton, whom he scorned and contemned. You little thought, Mr. Heathcote, that in the sea-chest yonder is an iron box containing stones of such value that if they were in your possession you would be independent for life."

He looked up and met the full gaze of Bertrand's eyes fixed upon him—eyes gleaming with hungry eagerness and greed for wealth. Perhaps the old man was struck by the revelation so obtained of his companion's nature, and began to distrust him; or he may have become conscious he was talking wildly.

Whatever was the reason, he paused abruptly, and passed his hand across his forehead, as if to chase away the shadows from his brow. His next words were uttered in a tone quite different to that which he had used during his late excitement.

"I am growing rather tired, Mr. Heathcote, and shall be better alone. I think, too, my mind has been wandering a little—indulging, in fact, in flights of fancy. We old travelers, you know, get into bad habits, and you must not believe all we tell you. Good-evening—good-evening."

Bertrand had no resource but to take his leave, and seek Penelope, whose sharp eyes soon discovered there was something amiss.

She listened in silence to her brother's account of his recent interview with their boarder, and the disappointment of his hopes.

"I think the old man is mad!" she exclaimed, contemptuously. "I always doubted him."

"Because you have no insight into character. For my own part, I am convinced not only of Ellerton's sanity, but that his wealth is as great as he represents it to be. I discovered the moment when his suspicious nature reasserted its influence, and when he would have given worlds to retract his words, but it was then too late."

"At any rate, it is clear we have not a chance of being a cent the better for all these boasted hoards," rejoined Penelope.

"That remains to be seen."

"How perverse you are, Bertrand! Did he not tell you that he had willed away his money?"

"But a bright idea has just struck me. I will not relinquish the prize for which I have striven, and may possibly win it after all."

"What is your brilliant project?" sneered Penelope.

"If this girl, Enid Lisle, is an heiress," he answered, impressively, "she will be able to enrich the husband of her choice."

"Well, what then?"

"Why should I not marry her?"

Penelope stared at him with open-mouthed astonishment.

"Marry a girl you have never seen! What nonsense you are talking!"

"I mean to seek her out without delay. The idea is plausible; at all events, it is worth while spending some time and trouble upon it before giving it up as impracticable. If I woo, win, and wed Miss Enid while she is unconscious of the impending change in her fortunes I shall obtain the character of being a disinterested lover, and afterward reap the reward of my devotion."

"Is it likely her friends will consent to such a marriage, even if the girl approves? You must own, Bertrand, you could not be considered an eligible match."

"They may not have the opportunity of refusing. Young girls are romantic, and do not object to an elopement with an ardent suitor who pleads his cause well. If she is poor—living in dependence upon relatives or friends—she will not have been pestered with wooers, and I shall have less difficulty in persuading her to listen to my vows."

"Your plan seems to me beset with dangers and difficulties," observed Penelope. "I frankly confess I do not like it."

"What special apprehensions assail you, sister mine?"

"The old man may linger on for years, and alter his will at last."

"We must run a risk, like all other speculators. If his frail life was all that stood between me and the wealth I crave, I have a presentiment he would not linger long."

"Bertrand!"

"Well, Penelope, why do you look so scared? Presentiments do not always come true; and if mine did, you would be none the poorer. You should have a dowry of ten thousand dollars when you married Maxwell, if I were master of old Ellerton's money."

"Hush, Bertrand! We will not discuss the subject further. I fancied just now I heard a step on the landing outside. Perhaps Milly is listening."

But if the household drudge had been diversifying her monotonous labors by applying her ear to the keyhole, she managed to dive down stairs in time to escape detection, for when the door was opened, and Penelope looked over the balusters, all was gloom and silence.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. ORMESBY'S MANEUVER.

ENID LISLE sat near the window of the morning room, looking out upon the sweet-scented garden, where countless roses opened to the sunshine, and filled the air with fragrance. Her eyes, however, were apt to stray in the direction where she could catch the first glimpse of Basil Clifford if he approached the house.

Nearly a week had elapsed since his last visit, and a week seems like a century to a love-sick maiden whose beloved is absent.

Generally Basil was able to find some plausible excuse for calling regularly every day. There was sure to be a book either to lend or borrow, a duet to practice, or Mrs. Ormesby's co-operation to obtain in some plan of amusement. He was always cordially received as a favored guest, so Enid felt a vague sense of uneasiness, both at his continued absence and the silence preserved on the subject by her aunt and Jessica.

"Again idling away your time, my dear Enid!" sighed Mrs. Ormesby's voice behind her. "The task of training you to habits of industry is beyond my strength. I relinquish it in despair!"

"Indeed, aunt, I only came here five minutes ago, and have done all you bade me."

"My dear, you are an incorrigible idler! Do not contradict me by denying the fact. I wish I did not feel so acutely the responsibility

laid upon my shoulders; but it is my nature to endeavor to perform even unpleasant duties to the best of my ability. You must be aware, Enid, that your education is not so thorough and complete as your dear uncle would have approved."

"I did not know—" began the girl, then stopped, embarrassed by the stern, judicial gaze fixed upon her.

Mrs. Ormesby gave a frosty smile.

"Of course not, my dear; you are only a child. It is for your elders to judge of such matters, and remedy that deficiency. I have lately given much thought to the important subject, and have made arrangements which I trust your good sense will recognize as satisfactory. What say you to a twelvemonth passed at Madame Belleville's establishment for young ladies in New York."

"Oh, aunt," exclaimed Enid, in consternation, "you would not send me away from Sunnymead! I have never lived among strangers. Their ways will be new to me. I shall be always regretting the home and friends left behind in dear Dalebury."

"Very natural and proper, my dear; but these home-sick feelings will soon pass away. Both Jessica and I will miss you; but we must stifle our selfish sorrows in the reflection that the brief separation is for your welfare. A year soon slips away. You can then return with your education finished, and be ready to be introduced into society."

Enid knew it would be useless to rebel against an arrangement ostensibly made for her own benefit, though the prospect was decidedly disagreeable.

She did not at the moment conjecture that Mrs. Ormesby was desirous of removing her out of Basil's way as a dangerous rival to Jessica.

She had even a vague idea of enlisting his sympathy and persuading him to intercede on her behalf. He was such a favorite at Sunnymead that he might be able to induce her aunt to change her mind, and not insist on carrying out this unwelcome project.

This hope lightened her trouble. She dashed away the gathering tears, and said, half smiling, "At least I need not make myself miserable until the hour of departure arrives; that will be time enough."

"I am glad you are so reasonable," observed the elder lady, surprised as well as gratified at her niece's ready acquiescence. "To-day you may employ in packing such things as you desire to take with you, though Madame Belleville has instructions to attend to your wardrobe, and to provide all that is necessary. We start for New York by an early train to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Enid could only repeat the word that sounded the knell of her hopes.

"Why not?" inquired her aunt, sharply. "We are not going to take a voyage round the world, that a month need be spent in preparation. The journey is a mere trifle, and I shall place you myself under madame's charge."

"I should like to wish my friends good-by," murmured the girl.

"I will give them your adieux and messages. People will understand that you had no time for leave-taking."

"Do you think Mr. Clifford will call to-day?" asked Enid, carelessly, though her face was suffused with crimson, and the hand that put back an intrusive spray of honeysuckle, which persisted in looking in at the window, trembled as it performed its task.

"What an extraordinary question!" remarked her aunt, severely. "I never thought that you would feel interested in the young man's visit when matters of far more importance claim your attention. But I must tell you that he is not likely to return from the Highlands until his friend is out of danger."

"The Highlands! Is he there? Oh, aunt, you never told me!"

"Pray, Enid, do not get into a silly way of repeating words and asking idle questions. It is excessively ill-bred. Basil is at present up

the Hudson, whither he was summoned to the sick-bed of a friend, who met with serious injuries in a railway accident. They had been school-fellows and college chums, or something of the sort, and as the poor fellow's relatives are abroad, Basil has decided to stay with him while he can be of any use."

"You knew all this, aunt, while I was wondering as to the reason of his long absence!"

Jane Ormesby's large, dark eyes flashed with wrath. The audacious girl dared openly to proclaim her interest in the young man's movements. She would have liked to shake her, yet she controlled all outward display of anger, and answered with an air of indifference.

"It would have been strange if Basil had not enlightened me as to the object of his sudden journey, since I disapprove of a direct correspondence with Jessica until their engagement is made public."

A mist arose before Enid's eyes, and the sound of rushing waters was in her ears.

Mrs. Ormesby secretly enjoyed her manifest confusion.

"I did not know he was engaged to Jessica," said Enid, in a constrained voice.

"Oh, it was a settled thing months ago. But I cannot consent to part with my sweet child at present, nor permit the whole town to gossip over her intended marriage until the day is absolutely fixed. Jessica is so shy and sensitive that she dislikes any allusion being made to the subject; therefore, I warn you, Enid, not to repeat what I have told you."

Enid made an inarticulate response. Her heart was now the prey of love and jealousy. Why had Basil dealt so treacherously in winning her affection when he was pledged to another?

It did not occur to the maiden of seventeen that her aunt was capable of overstepping the boundaries of truth. Although she did not love the austere lady who exercised a stern guardianship over her, she respected her too much to believe her guilty of uttering a willful falsehood.

The ordeal at length was over. Mrs. Ormesby swept her silken draperies out of the room, and Enid, thankful to be alone, stole quietly to her own chamber. She could not have preserved the semblance of composure a minute longer, but must have given vent to her grief, shame, and anger. So great was her contempt for Basil's conduct, that she almost hoped her love would turn to aversion. If he intended to marry Jessica St. Aubyn, why had he neglected Mrs. Ormesby's daughter so frequently in order to seek the society of her humble little cousin, with looks and words no unfettered heart could withstand?

She paced the small apartment, blaming, by turns, her own folly, her lover's perfidy, and her aunt's cruelty in banishing her from home.

Madame Belleville's "finishing school" was a large square house, with extensive gardens in the rear. It had long narrow windows, with green shutters, and a sort of court-yard at the side, to which admission was gained through a tall iron gate, whose repellent aspect was increased by being studded with rusty knobs, as if intended to withstand a siege. There was an air of conventual seclusion about the place; the windows commanding a view of the street had their shutters closed and barred, while the foot of man was never allowed to tread the precincts where madame superintended the education, health, and morals of her youthful charges.

Enid Lisle, transplanted from Sunnymead to this large, dull house, where everybody surveyed her with critical eyes, and no one offered a kindly word of welcome, felt her heart sink with dependency.

Mrs. Ormesby had driven away with inward relief now that her task was finished; and Enid, sensitive and impulsive, felt like a prisoned bird, powerless to try its wings, longing for liberty, yet condemned to pine in captivity, and sing only at its master's will.

As days lagged slowly on, the monotonous routine of school life, to which she had never been inured in childhood, became more unendurable. Her mind was restless, her temper irritable. She could not forget Basil, and pictured him often by Jessica's side, paying her lover-like attentions and basking in her smiles, while she, with whom, for pastime, he had flirted, was scarcely honored with a passing thought.

There was a girl at the school, whose name was Rosetta Marsden. She was a short, plump damsel, about sixteen years of age, with an equable temper, and a capability of being, like the immortal Mark Tapley, "jolly under any circumstances." It is not surprising, then, that Enid and Miss Marsden soon became constant companions, if not friends.

"You are positively growing quite thin, Enid!" exclaimed this lively maiden, as they walked side by side out of the recitation room. "Your cheeks have a washed-out appearance, as if they were never to be revisited by a tinge of color. I believe you are homesick. Why not follow my example? Make yourself as comfortable here as madame's bad temper will permit, and look forward hopefully to a future which cannot be long in coming."

Enid's answer was cold and brief.

"I am not homesick, nor can I look forward with hope, for the future will bring me no happiness."

"Oh, my dear, it is very bad to give way to such gloomy thoughts! No wonder your spirits are depressed. I shall begin to imagine you have been crossed in love."

"You are quite mistaken," said Enid, stiffly, elevating her proud young head in anger at the suggestion. "And, Rosetta, you know madame would be very angry if she heard us talking in study hours."

"Oh, I am not to be silenced so easily! She would find it difficult to make me hold my tongue if I wanted to speak. Besides, I did not mean any harm, only I thought if you had quarreled with your lover, and knew he was now anxious to see you and make it up, you would be ever so much happier."

"I cannot understand you, Rosetta," said Enid, her heart beginning to throb wildly with undefined hopes.

"Well, he is a fine young fellow, with a mustache which makes you remember the Spanish proverb, 'A kiss without a mustache is like an egg without salt.' He has followed you from Massachusetts, and hung about the house, having found out, goodness knows how, where you were living; so, out of common gratitude, you ought to reciprocate such evident attachment."

"Dear Rosetta, do be serious if you have really anything to tell."

"Anything to tell! I like that! Why, it was quite an adventure, and adventures are scarce enough at Madame Belleville's. I can see by your blushes that the hero of my romance is a favored swain, so if you are very good you shall hear the story."

Glancing slyly into Enid's face, to which alternate hope and fear lent an ever-varying expression, the girl continued, "You know that I spent yesterday, being a holiday, with my friends the Banks. As the day was fine I persuaded them to take me to the Park. Oh, I had such a fine time! I only wish you had been with me! Such gayly-dressed crowds, laughing and talking, and the driving! But there! I see you are growing impatient, so I will tell you about them another time. We had not been long in the grounds when I noticed a tall, gentlemanly man was eyeing me with great attention, and following our party at a respectful distance. I thought I had made a conquest; but I was never more deceived in my life, for though I was the object of attraction, it was not on my own account. In the museum I got separated from the Banks, and, to my consternation, found my supposed admirer was making his way toward me through the crowd. In vain I looked round for Mrs. Bank's white-plumed bonnet or

Marie's smiling face; they had disappeared, and the intrusive stranger was at my elbow. His first words, however, told me the real object of his interest in me. He asked me if I were not a pupil of Madame Belleville's, and if a young lady named Enid Lisle was in the same establishment."

"What did you answer?" asked Enid, almost breathless with anxiety.

"At first I was inclined to seek refuge in dignified silence; but he pleaded his cause so well that I was induced to relent. It seems he had fallen in love with you before you left Dalebury, and had taken no end of trouble to follow and find out whither you had gone. Last Sunday he happened to see us coming out of church; but of course we were chaperoned by the ugliest and most grim-looking of the teachers, so he dared not approach. He recognized me as your friend when he saw me in the Park, and took courage to speak. Oh, Enid, it must be charming to have such a devoted lover; and now that you know he is fond and faithful you will no longer wear such doleful looks, but be as happy as the day is long."

In the joy of believing that Basil Clifford loved her, and had taken the only means of communication that lay in his power to assure her of that love, Enid at first forgot her jealousy of Jessica. It returned now with full force, and she said, coldly:

"If this mysterious stranger is the person whom I suppose, he owes me an explanation, without which I could not receive any profession of love."

"He said he could explain everything," cried Rosetta, eagerly, delighted with her role as confederate, "if you would only grant him an interview."

"That seems impossible," said Enid, thoughtfully. "Do you think madame would allow me to see him if he called?"

"I am certain she would not. Madame objects to gentleman visitors even if they are relations; and unless she had special directions from your aunt to relax her rules in your favor, your friend would have no chance of gaining admittance."

"Then I cannot see him," said Enid, in a dejected tone. "You know we are never allowed to go out alone."

"Pooh! nonsense!—you are easily disheartened. I have been at school much longer than you, and know there are means of eluding the vigilance of madame and her spies."

"Tell me, Rosetta, what to do, and I will follow your advice."

"Suppose, then, you make up your mind to meet your handsome adorer at the foot of the garden when all the rest of the household have retired. He told me he would be there to-night."

"How could I leave the house when all the doors are securely fastened?" asked Enid, tremulously, almost determined to run any risk rather than lose the promised delight of a few minutes' conversation with her lover.

"You can descend from the window of our sleeping-room, which luckily happens not to be very far from the ground, and has a friendly tree standing close at hand, whose strong branches will serve the purpose of a ladder. I promise not to tell."

"It would be so bold, so wrong!" stammered the poor girl, troubled by conflicting feelings.

"There is not much harm. 'Love laughs at locksmiths,' they say; and if madame is cruel enough to attempt to separate two confiding hearts by arbitrary rules and regulations, it is necessary, in self-defense, to resort to artifice. Think of the poor young fellow scrambling as he best can over the high fence, and standing in the dismal garden counting the moments until his lady-love appears! What would be his disappointment if he did not see you? He would make up his mind that you were quite indifferent to his devotion."

Enid, after a sharp struggle between duty and love, yielded, in defiance of her better judgment, to these specious arguments.

CHAPTER V.

A YOUNG GIRL'S FOLLY.

THE night-wind was whispering amid the trees, the moon hung clear and bright in the summer sky, when Enid stood in her quiet room, looking pale and agitated, but withal resolute, as she gazed out into the night. The other inmates of the house had long been sleeping, except Rosetta, who remained awake to see the fun, as she phrased it, or give any assistance her friend might need. A church clock chimed forth the hour of the intended meeting, yet Enid lingered.

"Enid," murmured Rosetta, from her little white bed at the further end of the room, "did you not hear eleven strike? Are you not going?"

Enid turned a pale face toward her.

"You are positive that he really wishes to see me, and said this would be our only chance of exchanging a few words?"

"Don't ask such silly questions! Of course I am certain. His entreaties were quite heart-rending; and you must be cold as an icicle if you disappoint him."

At that moment a tall, manly figure was seen moving amid the shadows cast by a group of trees at the end of the garden. It was unrecognizable, owing to the distance and partial darkness; but Enid's last scruples vanished at the thought of her lover's presence.

Slowly and noiselessly she opened the window, and, standing on the sill, her heart beating quicker than usual, prepared for the descent.

She was soon seated on a strong branch capable of bearing twice her weight, and it was not long before she reached the ground.

From the shadows the tall figures stepped forth to meet her, and she stood face to face with—Bertrand Heathcote!

A low cry of terror and dismay escaped her lips at the sight of this stranger instead of the familiar form of him she loved. Faintness crept over her, she tottered and would have fallen had not Bertrand caught her.

"My dear Miss Lisle, pray be composed," he whispered, in honeyed accents. "It is so kind of you to meet me here!"

His voice and touch roused her more quickly than the most reviving cordial.

She extricated herself hastily from his arms, and exclaimed, with flashing eyes, "There is some mistake! What brings you to this place? Why did you dare send a message to me—a stranger?"

"Because I love you, and have followed you from your home to tell you of my love," answered Bertrand, with well-feigned warmth. "Sweet Enid, do not look on me so coldly. I hoped for a kinder reception."

"I never saw you before," she stammered, in bewilderment.

"But I have seen you, and fallen a captive to the power of your beauty. Did not your good-natured little friend repeat the message I sent you yesterday—else why are you here to-night?"

"I expected to see a very different person."

"Ah, I can guess his name—Mr. Basil Clifford."

Enid started. Had this strange man come as ambassador from her lover? Was she mistaken in supposing he pleaded his own love? In her confusion, nothing seemed too wild or improbable for belief.

"Has he sent you?" she faltered.

"I do not hold my services at his disposal; but as I have lately come from Dalebury, I can give you tidings of your friend. I warn you, the news may not be agreeable; so, if you prefer, I will keep silence."

"Anything is better than suspense," she murmured, inwardly. "Speak on, sir, if you have aught to tell me," she added, aloud.

"You know that in a country town people will talk when any special event is likely to take place. A grand wedding, for instance, is always the subject for gossip, particularly when bride and bridegroom are well known and respected."

"Is Basil married?" she questioned eagerly, forgetful of all else but this threatened death-blow of her hopes.

"Not yet, but I believe the day is fixed. Do you wish to know the name of the fortunate fair one?"

"I can guess."

"No doubt your suspicions are correct, for it seems an old attachment, Miss Jessica St. Aubyn, the late rector's step-daughter, will be envied by many of the ladies in the county who might desire to rule over Clifford Hall."

Enid made an effort to rally her spirits, and hide all outward sign of suffering.

"I wish them every happiness," she said, firmly. "They are both my friends, and I trust have a blissful future before them."

"You are courageous, Miss Lisle," remarked Bertrand, with deliberate emphasis. "You bear the news well; yet I have been told that you were sent away from Sunnymead because you threatened to become your cousin's rival. Mrs. Ormesby was too shrewd a mother not to observe your partiality for her daughter's betrothed."

Enid looked almost with fear into the calm face before her, and to which the moonlight gave a ghastly pallor.

"How have you learnt all this? You are to me a stranger, yet seem to know what I thought to keep secret from the prying gaze of those who can have no interest in the matter."

"My interest is in you, Enid. Have I not said I love you?"

"Leave me," she said, proudly; "your presence is an insult; your protestations of love incredible. I have been weak and foolish to come here to-night; but you will let the mad folly of which I am guilty be buried in oblivion if you are a man of honor."

"One word of kindness would purchase my secrecy more effectually than these airs of cold disdain. Even from you, Enid, I will not brook a command, although your smile might bend me to your will."

"You would not betray me?" she faltered.

"Only think of the temptation!" he returned, with a mocking smile. "I should be able to boast that Enid Lisle, the lovely niece of Dalebury's late respected rector, met me alone at midnight while her worthy teacher slept, never dreaming of her pupil's escapade. But we will not speak of this now. Rather let me tell you how you may show your aunt and Mr. Clifford that the knowledge of this approaching marriage gives you no pain."

"Ah, if I could only die!" she said, bursting into a flood of passionate tears. "No one loves me. I am forsaken and despised by those whom I most trusted."

"Do not talk of dying; you must live to forget the past, and enjoy a future which shall be made happy by the devotion of a constant heart. Waste not another thought on Basil Clifford."

Then seizing her hand, he poured forth impassioned vows of love, and told the false story he had concocted concerning a first meeting at Dalebury, where he had been struck with her beauty, though himself unnoticed, and how that from that hour he had lost his heart. He offered to take her away from the hated school, and bear her to a pleasant home, where, as his beloved wife, she would no longer be dependent on Mrs. Ormesby's bounty.

"I am but a poor artist, dearest," he said, "and our home will have few luxuries; yet you shall be happier than you have ever been before. My life will be devoted to shielding you from every care; and my sister Penelope, a noble-hearted and amiable woman, will receive my young bride with open arms."

While he thus spoke, Enid, at first indignant and wrathful, became gradually calm; and it must be confessed that, in her state of mind, the picture he drew was not devoid of charm. She was reckless as to her own future, but rejoiced in imagining aunt Ormesby discomfited and Basil's vanity wounded when they should hear that she was married.

It is not to be supposed the girl deliberately

consented to marry Bertrand during this first interview, but she listened to his pleading more patiently than was prudent, and was at length prevailed upon to walk in the garden at a certain hour next day, for the purpose of picking up a letter which should explain more fully than time just then permitted the aspirations of her new lover.

When they separated, he was justified in considering he had made good progress.

"I shall succeed in winning her," he thought, "though I wish it were possible to get possession of her fortune without the accompanying incumbrance. She is rather pretty, but too pale and lackadaisical for my taste. I wish she were more like Rose Burton, the variety actress. She is a fine woman, and no mistake! Then this Enid is evidently over head and ears in love with the fellow of whom Rachel told me. Indeed, I may thank that gossiping old woman for all her correct information regarding her former nursing. A little money judiciously bestowed, and a great deal of 'soft sawder,' work miracles."

In pursuance of this resolution, Bertrand continued the campaign with dogged perseverance. No knight in days of chivalry fought more energetically to win his fair lady. But the weapons used were neither sword nor spear; they were skillful probing of human weakness, falsehood dexterously insinuated, or truth suppressed.

Before starting for Dalebury he had raised a sum of money by borrowing from a loan office and selling his watch and chain, also a few old-fashioned trinkets belonging to Penelope; so he had plenty of funds to carry out his scheme. He managed not only to live respectably, but to secure allies even in Madame Belleville's strict establishment by liberal bribery. Sympathetic domestics were ready to oblige him by taking letters and messages for a suitable recompense, and to assist him in his romantic love-affair.

Meetings were arranged by the exertions of Rosetta, who coaxed her friends, the Banks, into becoming promoters of the match. It is scarcely wonderful that Enid, surrounded by these influences, gave way to the impulse of her own undisciplined nature, and before a month was over became the promised wife of Bertrand Heathcote.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

PENELOPE HEATHCOTE, as we have seen, was at the best a person of gloomy and anxious temperament, ever prone to see gathering clouds in the distance, which foretell the speedy departure of those interludes of sunshine that are mercifully allowed to brighten the most troubled lives.

One particular afternoon toward the close of August she seemed more burdened than usual with the weight of care, now pacing the room with feverish energy, now casting herself into a chair, and burying her face in her hands, while she gave way to a train of reflection, evidently the reverse of soothing.

"Why does he not write?" she said, half aloud, apostrophizing her absent brother. "It is of the greatest importance that he should learn what has happened, yet I know not where a letter would reach him."

As if in answer to her impatient speech, she heard the slight noise made by a latch-key turning in the lock of the outer door, followed by a familiar footstep in the hall. Bertrand walked into the room, alert and smiling, triumph impressed on every lineament.

"Well, Pen, I am at home at last. How have you been getting on since I left you? I cannot compliment you on your appearance; you look wretchedly ill. As for me, I have succeeded almost beyond my expectations. You may congratulate me, my dear. Behold in me the happy bridegroom of old Ellerton's heiress."

"Surely you are not married?"

"No wonder you are astonished. I can scarcely believe my own good luck. It required

a good deal of tact and finesse, I can tell you, to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion in so short a time. What falsehoods I was obliged to tell—what bribes to bestow in order to stimulate the zeal of those who assisted me! I will not bore you now with details of the manner in which I overcame difficulties which seemed insuperable. Suffice it to say that Enid Lisle, the heiress, has been converted into Mrs. Bertrand Heathcote."

Penelope made no answer, but sat rocking herself to and fro, like one in pain.

"How glum you are! Is Maxwell ill, or have you got the toothache? You might congratulate a fellow on his marriage, I should think," said Bertrand, in an injured tone.

"Where is your wife?" questioned Penelope, evading a direct reply.

"I have placed her in a cheap boarding-place for the present, until I decide what is to be done. So far I have prospered, but much depends on the next move. Old Ellerton's death would simplify matters, as there would be nothing to do then except to claim the money. Is there any chance of such a consummation? I have not yet asked after the old gentleman."

"How can I tell you?" faltered Penelope, despairingly.

"Tell me what?"

A vague yet terrible fear caused his face to become almost livid. He had cast his all upon that one die, and if he lost it would be ruin!

"Speak woman! do not torture me!" he cried, roughly, clutching her arm until the pressure gave her pain.

"Ellerton has gone—left the house!"

"Gone where?"

"I do not know."

An oath escaped Bertrand's lips. What with rage and impatience, his countenance assumed almost a fiendish expression as he stood before his sister looking eagerly down into her face.

"You have more to tell me. Go on, go on, before I wring the truth from you!"

"Yesterday," replied Penelope, "I went out in the morning to do a little shopping. When I returned Milly told me that almost immediately after my departure our boarder sent her for a hack, in which he drove off with his valise, giving her to understand that she was not likely to see him again."

Bertrand looked slightly relieved.

"I always knew he was an eccentric individual, but we shall hear from him soon. At all events I have married the girl he has made his heiress, and if it is necessary to confess the fact we shall soon persuade him to give his blessing on the union."

"Ah, my dear brother, you are ever too sanguine and rash. Remember I always had my doubts. The man I believe to be an impostor!"

Bertrand stared at her in amazement; he was stricken dumb.

"When I went into his room," she continued, "I saw a paper, on which he had scribbled in pencil a few lines addressed to you, lying on the table. I ventured to glance over it, and thus was prepared for the worst. His great sea-chest was open and its contents scattered about the room—a few old clothes such as a Jew clothesman might buy for a trifle, and the famous iron box, in which, instead of diamonds, were pieces of broken glass and valueless crystals. Ah, Bertrand, you have been cruelly deceived. If the man is not an impostor, he is a raging lunatic!"

"Give me the note!" said Bertrand, hoarsely.

She took it from a little drawer in her work-box, and gave it him without a word, eying him, meanwhile, compassionately. As we have said, she loved her brother dearly, and in his disappointment forgot her own.

This is what he read:—

"MR. BERTRAND HEATHCOTE:—
"I have thought fit to leave your house without giving the usual notice, but as I always paid a month in advance, you are no loser. The contents of my chest, which are at your disposal, I consider a fair equivalent for any inconvenience you may sustain through my unexpected departure. You are also

welcome to the diamonds which I told you were intended for my heiress. I really think that you believed my flights of imagination and that my castle-building was not in the air. The shrewdest are mistaken sometimes; why not you as well as the rest? It is probable we shall never meet again. I may go abroad, and die; it is almost time I did. Thanks to you and Miss Penelope for your disinterested kindness. Yours, LIONEL ELLERTON."

Twice did Bertrand read over this strange epistle. Then he crushed it in his hand, and flung it violently to the other side of the room.

"I have been duped by a madman!" he cried angrily. "Fool that I was not to detect the vagaries of a crazy brain in the old idiot's rambling statement concerning his pretended wealth! I must have been only a trifle less insane than he!"

"I warned you to be careful," sighed Penelope, who derived some solace from recollecting that she had never entirely shared her brother's confidence in their eccentric boarder.

"Hold your tongue, or utter something more sensible than that parrot-like cry!" exclaimed the enraged young man.

And hurrying from the room he strode upstairs, and entered the vacant apartment where he had dreamt such golden visions of prosperity.

More than an hour he remained there, turning over and examining the articles Mr. Ellerton had left, in the hope of finding some clew to the mystery. Every pocket was ransacked, every garment unfolded, but no old letter or addressed envelope came to light which would enable him to follow up the old man's track in order to find out the cause of his strange behavior.

As to the value of the threadbare, old-fashioned raiment, Penelope's estimate was undoubtedly correct; and the rusty old cash-box, which Bertrand's too vivid imagination had beheld as the chosen receptacle of priceless gems, contained hoards of rubbish such as only a child or a madman would care to amass.

"And for this you have burdened yourself with a wife!" said Penelope; "a foolish, headstrong girl, no doubt, or she would not have been in such haste! Old Ellerton's heiress, indeed! Why, the man has nothing to bequeath! His wealth is a chimera, for which you bartered liberty!"

"You need not remind me of my bondage!" retorted her amiable brother. "I own I have been a fool. Let that avowal do once for all. Do not twit me again with my folly. As for Enid, I must bring her here."

"This is a shabby home for a young bride, brother."

"It is the best I can give her. I wish I had never seen her pale face, nor listened to old Ellerton's falsehoods."

They were silent for a time, for this was indeed a crushing blow. Bertrand, who fancied that he had wealth, and the advantages which accompany it, in his grasp, found himself poorer than ever, since he must repay his loan with exorbitant interest, besides having an unloved and unloving wife tied to him for life. He always reckoned on not having long to wait for Ellerton's demise. Perhaps the dark thought crossed his mind that, if need be, that feeble existence could be easily extinguished; a friendless old man boarding in his house, waited on chiefly by his sister, was almost at his mercy.

"What are you going to do now, Bertrand?" asked Penelope; for the silence was growing oppressive.

"I shall fetch my wife. Get ready a room for her reception."

With a scowling brow, he strode out of the house, crossed the ferry, and was soon at the house, where, he had taken Enid on their arrival in Philadelphia.

Enid was reading in a small but cheerful room; the tea articles were ready for use, and she had placed a bowl of late roses on the table. The young bride was striving with all her might to perform her duty as a wife, and to reciprocate the affection which she imagined her husband felt for her.

"Had he not overcome obstacles," she thought, "most men would have found insurmountable to woo and win her? Yes, therefore she must be grateful for such love, and endeavor to repay it."

So she decked her table with roses, wore her prettiest dress in anticipation of his return, and now greeted him with a smile which, if not bright and loving, was still very winsome.

"I have been waiting for you so long, dear, Has anything detained you?"

He flung himself on a chair opposite to her. His visage now wore an expression she had never before seen there. The veneer of tenderness and general amiability had given place to the natural moroseness and cruelty indicative of a depraved nature. She was alarmed at the sudden transformation.

"Get on your things," he said, abruptly. "We must quit this place. It is too expensive for beggars like you and me. I shall take you home at once."

"Do you mean to your sister Penelope? Oh, Bertrand, I am so glad! I never had a sister of my own; but now I shall feel the loss no longer. Do you think she will like me?"

"I cannot tell. It does not much matter. She will have to put up with your society."

His voice was harsh, his manner brutal, and Enid looked at him with amazement.

"I think something has happened which I ought to know," she said, with quiet firmness.

"You have been away only a few hours, and have returned thoroughly transformed. What has effected this sudden change? Does your sister disapprove of our marriage?"

This was the only solution to her perplexity which presented itself to her mind. Her calm, somewhat dignified, demeanor rather shamed Bertrand, and he attempted a feeble imitation of his former manner as he answered, "You must excuse me, my dear. I have been much annoyed about business matters, which you do not understand, and my temper being irritable, I cannot always keep it under control. We shall understand one another better by-and-by."

Enid sighed. It was so soon to receive a revelation of her husband's character.

Her anticipations of wedded bliss were, of course, not brilliant, for she was conscious that Bertrand did not possess her heart; but she had looked forward to a life of calm contentment, relying on his promise to devote himself to the task of trying to make her happy.

"Are you going to stand there until night-fall?" he cried, impatiently, breaking in on her reflections. "You have not much baggage, and it will not take long to put on your bonnet. Go up-stairs at once; I will settle with the landlady."

Sorrowfully she obeyed his mandate, casting a lingering glance at the tastefully-arranged tea-table, the appointment of which she had superintended with all the pride of a young wife anxious to try her skill in domestic duties. She saw Bertrand take up her admired bowl of roses (purchased on the street at a somewhat extravagant price) and fling the flowers out of the window, with a muttered remark that "their strong odor made his head ache."

She did not attempt remonstrance, though her heart sunk within her. Already she began to realize that she had found her master.

Such of her small possessions as had been unpacked were soon replaced in their various receptacles, and, hastily assuming hat and wrap, she descended to the parlor, where Bertrand, still sullen and frowning, had beguiled the last quarter of an hour in drumming impatiently with his fingers on the table, and anathematizing the dawdling propensities of womankind.

Enid had barely time to bid the landlady good-by (the latter was a kind-hearted creature, with daughters of her own, and had been inclined to make much of the pretty little bride) when she was hurried away. During the journey Bertrand maintained almost perfect silence, and Enid was not in a mood for conversation. Sunk back in a corner, she fell

into a reverie, which lasted until Bertrand informed her they had arrived at their destination.

Very dreary and comfortless appeared the house in Budd Street. Enid, who had no practical acquaintance with poverty, shrunk back aghast at sight of the dark, narrow hall where Milly stood, with her coarse bib-apron, unwashed face and tangled hair, innocent of brush and comb.

Her husband took her hand and led her into the sitting-room.

"Here is my wife, Penelope," he said, carelessly.

Enid, in timid awe, raised her eyes to the tall, dark woman who towered far above her. To her Miss Heathcote looked harsh-featured, middle-aged, altogether unprepossessing, and different to the creature of her imagination; while Penelope regarded contemptuously the fragile form and fair, delicate face of the child-wife who had already turned out a failure.

"What a wife for Bertrand! A woman without beauty, manner—above all, without money!" was Penelope's mental comment.

There was no sisterly greeting, no kiss of welcome. Penelope's cold fingers just touched Enid's hand, then, turning to a fair-haired, good-natured-looking young man who had risen on the bride's entrance from his seat near Penelope's, the introduction was formally made, "Mr. Walter Maxwell—Mrs. Heathcote."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, madam! This is an agreeable surprise. I had no idea until ten minutes ago that my friend Bertrand had stolen a march upon us and got married."

He gave Enid's hand a hearty shake, and the poor girl's heart went out to him in silent gratitude for his friendly reception. Under other circumstances she might have considered him ordinary in person and vulgar in manner; but at this moment she only noticed that he had a pleasant smile and that he surveyed her with an air of respectful admiration.

"Milly will show you your room," observed Penelope, coldly. "You have come so unexpectedly that I have had no time for preparation; but I trust you are not over-particular?"

"Oh, no!"

Enid glanced once more at the harsh, unsmiling countenance. Could this be the woman whom she had been promised would take her to her heart with more than sisterly affection?

Preceded by Milly, and followed by Bertrand grumbling, Enid ascended to the room recently occupied by old Ellerton.

How little she guessed what strange influence had altered the tenor of her life! But for this man, whom she had never seen, and whom she had heard of only in records of the past, which to her girlish fancy seemed as remote as if centuries had rolled away since all they told of had happened, she would have been still in Madame Bellville's seminary, undisturbed by the attention of Bertrand Heathcote.

"A poor, white faced, delicate thing is Bertrand's wife, to my fancy!" observed Penelope to her betrothed when they were left alone, "I fear my brother will learn to repent bitterly his bargain."

"I'm sure I don't know why you should think so," replied Mr. Maxwell. "She seems a pretty little creature, and the color of her hair is positively beautiful!"

"I did not know that you admired fair women!" said Penelope, coloring with anger.

"Every man who is not blind must know a pretty woman when he sees her. And she looked quite trim and smart, too, with the blue ribbon in her hair, and a hat with a jaunty feather! I think, Pen, you must profit by your sister-in-law's taste, and let her smarten you up a bit."

Penelope bit her lips.

"I thought you liked me as I am, Walter."

"So I do, of course, dear, or I should not have kept true to you all these years. You are a clever woman, strong-minded, and an excellent manager—just the partner a poor man

should choose to help him fight the battle of life! Bertrand's wife looks as if she must be petted and cherished, or else the fairies would carry her away."

"You are growing quite poetical!" she remarked, coldly.

"You mean I am generally such a prosy fellow. Well, never mind, Pen; we shall be well matched—a regular steady going, matter-of-fact couple!"

Penelope did not answer. Her bosom was often greatly agitated by jealousy when Walter Maxwell (who, by the way, was several years younger than herself) expressed his approval of any other lady's charms; and now his praise of Enid had provoked a more angry feeling within her than she ever before had experienced.

She could see the sharp contrast between the girl-wife and herself. And what was more, she knew that Maxwell was conscious of it; and although he had clumsily attempted to pay her a compliment, it was plain that he regarded Enid as the more attractive and lovable of the two.

Penelope from this moment began to hate her brother's wife.

CHAPTER VII.

BROKEN TIES.

THE cloud which hung over the little household in Budd street on the evening when the bride came home showed no signs of disappearing; on the contrary, it rather threatened to increase in density and gloom.

Bertrand, soured by disappointment, threw off altogether the mask under which his real character had been studiously concealed, and treated his wife with cruel neglect.

Forgetting that his own greed for gold had wrought all the mischief, he vented upon her defenseless head the misfortunes he had encountered in consequence of old Ellerton's duplicity. In his own mind, though most unjustly, he blamed her for everything that had happened. He was in great financial straits, and instead of working at his pictures to relieve himself, he wasted his time either in idly meditating over his troubles or searching for his former boarder. But as he could not afford to employ a detective, and in the city of Philadelphia there are many old gentlemen with gray beards, long white hair, and shabby brown coats, his quest was fruitless. Moreover he was not now quite clear as to the benefits that might accrue should the search prove successful.

Lionel Ellerton always seemed childish and weak-minded, and he had in addition, some years before, suffered from a sunstroke. His appearance and style indicated poverty, and he could not forgive himself for the folly of listening to the inventions of an old man's diseased brain.

Enid, in her misery, had no sympathizing friend to offer her sympathy or support, since Penelope's dislike was most pronounced, and Walter Maxwell dared only treat her with cold civility, for he dreaded greatly the displeasure of his betrothed.

After much anxious thought, Enid resolved to make an effort to restore happiness and unity between her husband and herself. Though she had been married scarcely a month, yet a lifetime of sorrow was crowded into in that short period.

How bitterly she repented her foolish step!

To her mind already the conventual seclusion of Madame Belleville's establishment seemed a Paradise as compared with her present abode.

Bertrand was smoking in the dingy, bare, untidy-looking room he called his studio, when Enid timidly entered. A glass of brandy-and-water stood beside him, which had been emptied and filled so many times in the course of the evening, that the effects, although not outwardly perceptible, produced in him an acerbity of temper, and raised up in his mind an exaggerated estimate of his own wrongs, which boded no good for the success of the young wife's mission.

Indeed, she could hardly have selected a more inopportune moment, but with her inexperience of mankind as represented by such worthless rogues as Bertrand Heathcote, she was not likely to perceive this until too late for remedy.

The slight rustling made by her dress made him aware of her presence; yet he did not turn his head as she advanced to the faded lounge on which he half-reclined, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Bertrand, I must speak with you; I cannot longer lead this life without telling you the suffering it costs me. In what have I displeased you? Why am I treated with this persistent coldness and cruelty?"

"No reproaches, if you please," he answered, turning upon her fiercely; "my temper will not stand them. It is enough to be tied for life to a fretful, sad-faced girl, whose indifference for me equals mine for her. I will not be bored with her complaints."

"Why did you marry me?" she asked, with indignation.

"Because I was an idiot, and thought—but that is no matter. I made a terrible mistake, for which we must both suffer."

"You said you loved me," she said, timidly.

"I said anything that was likely to attain my end."

"You do not, then?"

"Since you force me to speak, I must say no. I am not over susceptible; if ever I did care for any woman, it was for a certain handsome, dark-eyed witch, who had a heart to give the man who should marry her."

"And you are shameless enough to confess that you love another?"

"That speech does not come with a good grace from your lips, my young lady; you only married me out of pique, because you were so madly jealous of Mr. Basil Clifford. I mean to pay you off now for your want of taste. I was obliged to fawn and flatter, and tell lies by the dozen before I got you in my power. My turn has come at last. As for that young man, you may set your mind at ease, for though it was rumored at Dalebury that Mrs. Ormesby was anxious to secure him as a husband for her daughter, the gossips all allege that he showed no inclination for gratifying her ambition."

"Then you have deceived me!" burst out Enid.

A loud and mocking laugh was her only answer.

In her despair, reproaches, wild and violent, were poured forth upon the man who had so deeply wronged her. From this moment she lost all fear of Bertrand, all restraint over herself, and remembered only her wrecked life and her forfeiture of all happiness.

These upbraidings exhausted the scanty remnant of Bertrand Heathcote's patience. Pale with passion, he rose from his seat, and in another instant Enid was lying unconscious on the ground, felled by a stroke of his powerful arm.

A strange sense of bewilderment, a feeling of weakness, then memory gradually returned, and like the vague fantastic images in a dream sprung up the recollection of the scene which had taken place in the studio.

She was now in her own room, with the sun shining brightly in at the open window, and a bird, putting her in mind of the feathered songsters that warbled among the trees near Sunnymead, perched on the window-sill, with his head on one side, and a knowing expression in his beady eyes, as if he wondered why she lay so still and pale, while the rest of the world were either at work or play.

Penelope sat near her, darning stockings. Her lips were compressed and her countenance severe. Had the needle she was plying been a dagger making its way to the heart of a foe, she could scarcely have worn a more appropriately tragic expression.

Enid noticed all this, but she did not speak,

for her head ached, and the sound of her own voice would, she fancied, make it worse. Better lie there, enjoying the brief interval of peace, until she must again take up her burden of care.

It was not long, however, before Penelope finished her stocking, and happening to glance at the bed, saw that the light of consciousness had returned to Enid's eyes. She rose and approached the bedside.

"So you are better now? I was beginning to wonder when you would come round."

"Yes, I am better. Have I been ill long?"

"Not more than a fortnight. You have had a kind of low fever, and were delirious most of the time. You had better not talk before you take some nourishment."

Without the slightest show of tenderness, Penelope administered a few spoonfuls of some dark and greasy fluid, the product of Milly's culinary skill, which was not at all calculated, either in taste or appearance, to tempt a sickly appetite. She preserved, meanwhile, the same grim and inflexible deportment, as if she were acting under mental protest.

"I fear that I have given you much trouble," Enid said with hesitation.

Miss Heathcote only sighed, but it was so deep-drawn and significant a sigh that words could not have been more expressive. She looked searchingly into the cold, set face; she wondered whether Penelope knew all that had happened between her husband and herself, or whether she guessed the nature of that deadly breach, which no time or penitence could heal?

"Where is your brother?" she asked at length; for worlds she could not at that moment call him husband.

"I have not seen him since the night of your quarrel, Enid; you have driven him from home and to an untimely death!"

A fit of trembling seized the poor girl, and she clasped her hands imploringly.

"Penelope, do not speak so cruelly!"

"I cannot hide the truth, Enid, even although it be unpleasant. Every one could see that Bertrand was not happy in his married life. It might be either his fault or yours—I am no judge of such matters, though naturally I take my brother's side. One thing seems clear—your mutual dissensions have led him to a dreadful doom!"

"Surely he is not dead?" cried Enid, wildly.

"What else can I think when he disappears, and his hat and cane are found on the bank of the river?"

There was a long silence. Enid, weakened by illness, could scarcely realize what Penelope's words sought to convey. A great awe and horror fell upon her.

"You mean that Bertrand has committed self-destruction?"

"Spare me; I am his sister, and loved him better than his wife did," said Penelope, coldly.

"He may live; we cannot tell."

"As he took no money, nor even a change of clothes, with him, you may easily imagine that he had no intention of journeying either by land or sea; while the articles found on the river's bank are, to my mind, conclusive evidence of the fate that has befallen him."

She moved away from the bedside, as if she wished to say no more upon the subject, and Enid, stricken with awe rather than sorrow, lay quivering in every nerve. Tears at last relieved her overcharged heart, and she wept until exhaustion caused her to fall into a state of half-sleep, half-stupor.

As the days passed slowly away, Enid's health slowly improved. Her youth and sound constitution triumphed over all disadvantages, and though her spirits were depressed and her mind full of anxiety, she was well enough to leave her room and even to resume in a measure her usual avocations.

"Is there any news?" she daily asked Penelope, to whom she clung in despair, notwithstanding that lady's frigid and repulsive manner.

The answer was always in the negative.

"Have you caused inquiries to be made? Perhaps the police could help you to find Bertrand, or, at least, give you some proof of his death," urged Enid, one morning when her question had received the same reply as usual.

"Mr. Maxwell has done all that is needful."

"I thought he was away from the city just now, on business connected with the firm," remarked the girl, innocently, but that observation roused Penelope's displeasure.

"You are mistaken, unless you are speaking out of pure vindictiveness. He has been exerting himself, although unsuccessfully, to the utmost in this melancholy affair; that is the reason we have not seen him lately."

"And the river has been dragged?" hazarded Enid, timidly.

"Have I not told you that Mr. Maxwell has spared me the painful duty of directing measures for the recovery of the body and of listening to detailed accounts of their failure in the searches which have been instituted? I wish you were as considerate. Every reasonable person must feel that all hope is over of Bertrand's safe return."

Enid sat grave and silent, troubled by a vague self-reproach. Could it possibly be, as Penelope affirmed, that she was in any way responsible for having sent the man to whom she had given her hand at the altar to a suicide's doom? Surely, in their last altercation, she had been more sinned against than sinning.

She began, however, to realize that her conduct had not been such as her now awakened conscience could approve. Putting aside the ingratitude and disobedience she had shown toward her aunt by eloping from the school where she placed her, nothing could excuse the step of forming a loveless marriage. It was wrong both to Bertrand and herself. But the past was irrevocable, as she acknowledged, with a sigh, and she had not yet begun to contemplate the future.

"Is there not a particular style of dress for widows?" she began, with hesitation, thinking it would be necessary to show at least the ordinary outward signs of respect for the departed. "Have you ordered our mourning, Penelope?"

"Mourning is expensive, and we are very poor. Your marriage has not been announced to your friends; therefore I advise you to keep it a profound secret, and return home without loss of time."

Enid stared at her in amazement.

"But I cannot. My aunt will have learnt that I quitted Madame Belleville's, and will require an explanation."

"Tell her you were unhappy at school, so ran away and entered the service of a lady who brought you to Philadelphia."

Evidently Penelope had given some thought previously to the subject.

"She would ask all kinds of questions, and I could not weave a tissue of falsehoods," said Enid, disconsolately.

"Then say whatever you please; but I give you fair warning you cannot remain here much longer."

"Oh, Penelope, what will become of me?"

She was scarcely more than a child, and had always hitherto had a home, protection, and a due amount of the comforts if not luxuries of life. She now found herself estranged from her friends, almost penniless, about to be cast from the shelter to which she clung, not because she loved it, but because she dreaded being thrown on the tender mercies of a cold world ever ready to neglect the claims of the poor and helpless. The prospect was appalling, and even Penelope's hard heart was touched by her appeal.

"You had better take my advice, and go back to Dalebury," she said, in a gentler tone; "for you would find it difficult to get employment without references. You might be suitable for a governess or companion if you were a few years older; but ladies are apt to make so many inquiries, which you might find it difficult to answer. But you must do something, as my small stock of money has nearly

run out. The landlord presses for rent, and threatens to seize the furniture, so we have no choice but to separate."

"What do you mean to do yourself, Penelope?"

"Oh, I shall manage well enough. I may marry Walter Maxwell. It is time I settled in life; or if we decide on waiting awhile longer, I could get an engagement as housekeeper. You have been brought up a useless fine lady; but my habits are active and industrious, so I can always gain my living."

Enid, who was plunged for a time, in meditation, at length said, decisively, "It may be after all, best for me to return to Dalebury, where I have several friends who will no doubt interest themselves on my behalf; but I shall not disown my marriage."

Penelope's reddish-brown eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

"You will repent your obstinacy," she said, in a menacing tone. "I am older than you, and have advised you for the best. Once let folks know that you eloped with Bertrand, and questions would be asked, disagreeable rumors circulated, and people might even doubt whether you were legally married."

"But I could show them my certificate," said Enid, triumphantly. "I have got it; at least,"—recollecting herself—"not I, but Bertrand took charge of it."

"I have looked carefully among my brother's papers, without discovering the least trace of such a document. Do not imagine I wish to cast the slightest slur upon his memory or your character; but it is unfortunate—very unfortunate."

This sounded terrible to Enid, who, like most girls of her age, was totally ignorant of all legal matters. Had she been older and wiser, she would have been aware that a copy of the certificate could be easily procured by application to the proper quarter; but not knowing this, she pictured the doubts and sneers with which aunt Ormesby would receive the intelligence that she was a wife and widow, without any proof except her bare word. She began to ponder over the advisability of concealing all about it.

"Will you be ready to-morrow?" asked Penelope. "There is a morning train at 12.30, which you had better take to make a connection in New York."

"Yes; I will go to-morrow," she replied, meekly.

"That is well. Whatever really has to be done is less troublesome when there is no unnecessary delay. If I were obliged to swim through a river, I would rather plunge in at once than wait about shivering on the shore. Suspense is worse than reality."

In the prospect of her sister-in-law's almost immediate departure, Penelope's spirits became lighter; and Enid soon after heard her speaking to Milly in the kitchen with a cheerfulness which was quite surprising in one who professed such deep regret for her brother's untimely end.

When the day was drawing to a close, and twilight's gray veil descended on the streets, Penelope assumed walking attire, and telling the little handmaiden she was going for a short stroll, and would return shortly, took her way out a country road.

It was nearly dark, and the place looked comparatively deserted; but she had not proceeded many yards when footsteps sounded behind her, and a man, wearing a broad-brimmed hat pulled down upon his brows, and a wrap round his throat, arranged so as to hide the lower part of his face (although the weather was not cold), came up and touched her on the elbow. It was Bertrand.

Penelope did not faint nor scream, neither did she give vent to any rapturous expressions of joy; on the contrary, she seemed as little discomposed by his sudden appearance as if she expected to meet him, which perhaps she did.

"Well, Penelope, what news? Have you spoken to Enid as I directed? Is there a chance

of my getting rid of her without any unpleasant exposure?"

"She leaves for Dalebury to-morrow."

"Good news, indeed! And you really believe she thinks me dead?"

"If she does not, it is no fault of mine."

"Thanks, Pen! You are a clever woman and a staunch ally. Have you persuaded her to keep our marriage secret?"

"I scarcely think I should have succeeded if you had not prudently retained possession of the certificate. Armed with that knowledge, I was able to manage her."

"Then I am, to all intents and purposes, a free man once more, and not hampered with a dull, unloving wife, who would hang like a stone around my neck, dragging me down to ruin. As my creditors are troublesome, I am better out of the way. Perhaps I may emigrate, and try my fortune in one of those happy places where money is made with greater ease and rapidity than in overcrowded cities."

"Sanguine as ever, Bertrand. Will experience never make you wise? Remember, you would not have fallen into this scrape had you possessed common prudence."

"Don't preach, Pen. I shall come out of it all not much the worse."

"But the poor girl?"

Even Bertrand's hardened conscience felt a slight sting.

"I know she has been badly treated. If she loved me, I could not do it, base though my morals may be; but she only married me to spite that fellow down at Dalebury, and for aught I care he is welcome to her now."

After a few minutes more, spent in conversation, the brother and sister parted, and as Penelope wended her way homeward she murmured to herself, "Much as I love you, Bertrand, I would not aid you in thus breaking your fetters if I did not feel that Enid's baby-face and affected sweetness was winning from me the affection I prize above all else the world can bestow. Walter's eyes kindle with admiration when they gaze upon her, while I sit by neglected. Let her then depart and leave me the lover of my youth, whose allegiance to me never swerved until she came between him and me."

The autumnal sky was gray and chill, while a sharp wind reminded those passengers who passed out of Broad street depot, bound on a journey northeast, that summer had departed and winter was drawing near with rapid, though stealthy strides.

Enid, ensconced in a corner of a seat, of which she happened to be the sole occupant, put aside her veil to let the breeze play upon her face. She had so long been immured in the close, dark house in Budd street that the pure air appeared to have the invigorating qualities of a reviving cordial, which refreshed her frame and raised her spirits.

A faint rose-tint crept over her cheek, and her eyes lost their heaviness and languor as she was whirled onward from the smoke, and dust, and dirt of the city out into the open country, where the grass still looked fresh and green, though the trees began to lose their foliage.

She did not wish to become dependent on her aunt's bounty—if, indeed, that lady was willing to condone the past, which was more than doubtful. But Mrs. Brooke had shown her great kindness, and was renowned for her untiring benevolence to all in whom she took an interest.

What was more likely, then, than that she should be able to find some situation for Enid, whether as teacher in a humble school, or an assistant in a store or work-room, where she might earn her bread honestly and keep her secret to the end?

She had reached a station where the train stopped to take in more passengers. An old gentleman, with a long, gray beard, and restless, light-blue eyes, was standing among others on the platform. He started as his glance fell on Enid's face, and made all haste

that his age and infirmity would permit to enter the car where she was seated.

Once settled in the same seat, his scrutiny became almost embarrassing; yet such an expression of intense pleasure flitted over his countenance, he seemed so childishly happy in scanning her thus curiously, that she scarcely could imagine him to be actuated by deliberate rudeness.

Suddenly he stretched his trembling hand toward her, and as if obeying an irrepressible impulse, murmured: "Enid Vere, have you forgotten Lionel Ellerton?"

A remembrance of nurse Rachel's stories of bygone times like a ray of light began to dawn on the girl's mind. By intuition she knew that her strong resemblance to one now moldering in the grave had brought back to her questioner the vanished past, causing the aged man to forget the lapse of years, and to believe he saw before him the unforgotten love of his youth.

"I am Enid Lisle," she said, gently. "Remember that Enid Vere, had she lived, would be an old woman now. I am her grandchild, but I know who you are, for nurse Rachel has spoken of you often."

The shadows cleared from old Ellerton's weak, bewildered brain. He knew he had found the girl in search of whom he was at this moment on his way to Dalebury.

And here it may be as well to explain the motive which led this eccentric gentleman to leave the Heathcotes in so strange a manner, causing them to believe they had harbored an impostor.

On the evening when, in a fit of unwonted confidence, he had chanced to communicate to Bertrand his intention of making Enid his heiress, he was struck by the expression of eager cupidity on the young man's face while the latter listened to his narration.

A feeling of regret that he had reposed so much trust in a comparative stranger, mingled with vague suspicions that the Heathcotes might devise some plan of robbing him (through his own imprudence they had become aware of the valuable property in his possession), caused him to form a resolution not quite compatible with strict notions of honor, though Mr. Ellerton considered he was only using proper precautions.

Bertrand would doubtless, so he thought, take Penelope into his confidence, and he determined to overhear what was said upon the subject. Very softly he stole down stairs, and applied his ear to the crevice of the parlor door.

By that time the brother and sister had been some minutes in conversation; but though too late to hear of the conspiracy against Enid, he gathered sufficient to warn him of danger in remaining longer under their roof.

"If his frail life were all that stood between me and the wealth I crave, I have a presentiment he would not linger long."

This was what the old man had heard Bertrand tell his sister, and no wonder he affixed to it a fearful significance.

The next day Bertrand had left home—ostensibly on business, but in reality to commence his designs on the supposed heiress.

Mr. Ellerton determined not to await his return; and as a grim kind of practical joke, as well as to prevent any chance of pursuit, he wrote the letter which entirely misled the Heathcotes, and substituted worthless imitations for real diamonds.

Having thus in his own estimation turned the tables on his enemy, he quitted Budd street with all his valuables, and after awhile determined to travel to Dalebury to make Enid's acquaintance.

He had once started on his journey, when excitement and unaccustomed exertion brought on an attack of illness. He had seemed in such a dangerous condition, that when the train reached the next station, he was removed by the railway officials to a hotel, where he lay for weeks under medical treatment, thinking his last hour was at hand.

But he had recovered, and was resuming once more his interrupted journey, when the sight of Enid made him her fellow-traveler, and resulted in mutual recognition.

It may have been a proof of Mr. Ellerton's eccentricity, or only the natural consequences of a passion cherished through life, but he who had amassed and hoarded a large fortune, begrudging every quarter spent upon his own requirements, was now prepared to lavish wealth upon the girl who so forcibly reminded him of his early love.

Enid was to be his adopted child, the joy and pride of his age. If she could only bear with an old man's whims, and bestow on him some share of affection, he would be amply repaid for all the advantages he was ready to give.

He told her of his disappointed youth and struggling manhood; how at last, when age and infirmity stole upon him, and he could no longer hope to add to his store, he returned to his native land, and took up his residence with Bertrand and his sister.

Enid's heart sunk within her when he spoke of his recent sojourn beneath their roof, and the causes which led to its abrupt termination.

"The man was a scoundrel—an assassin!" he concluded, with perhaps justifiable wrath. "Sooner than he should be enriched by me, I would have flung my money into the river. I can fathom now the depths of his mean nature. He suspected me to be rich, and tried to wheedle himself into my favor; and when he found there was no chance of inheriting my gold, I believe he would have murdered me for the sake of the diamonds. I can only pray, Enid, my love, that he may never cross your path when I am no more, for he is just the cringing, pitiful knave who would resort to any artifice or any crime for the sake of marrying an heiress."

She could not tell him now; the words died away on her cold lips, a mist obscured the wrinkled, kindly face before her; but she understood the plot to which she had fallen a victim, and its presumed failure. Why need she speak? Bertrand was dead, so would never trouble her again; and Penelope, living in Camden, absorbed in her daily cares, need never learn that the despised girl whose marriage she pretended to doubt was prosperous and happy.

What made her most uneasy was the thought of how to parry aunt Ormesby's curiosity concerning events subsequent to her flight from school, which she had doubtless learned from Madame Belleville; but, as if in answer to her uneasy reflections, at that moment her self-constituted guardian calmly inquired why she was not wearing mourning for the rector's widow, whose death from bronchitis he had seen announced in the newspaper some weeks ago.

"I was very ill myself, child, then, and it grieved me more than I can tell to learn that you had lost your protectress and relative, while I was unable to be of any use. The news made me worse, and I had a kind of relapse, that left me quite prostrated for a time. But now I am strong again—at least, as strong as a man of seventy-five can expect to be; and it shall be my care that your new home shall not make you regret having left Sunnymead."

It was fortunate for Enid that Lionel Ellerton's intense satisfaction made him so excited and garrulous that he scarcely seemed to expect her to take much part in the conversation.

When she briefly stated that being unhappy at the school, she left it without her aunt's permission, and placed herself under the care of a lady who brought her to Philadelphia, an invention prompted by Penelope, the old man rubbed his hands and chuckled, applauding her spirit, and launched forth into reminiscences of his own school life and its exploits.

Enid was grateful that he asked no particulars, not even the lady's name, but at once took it for granted that she was only guilty of a girlish escapade, and was now returning to her friends at Dalebury.

So the Rubicon was passed, and from henceforth her short married life must be a folded page, never to be reopened to mortal eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

NEARLY a year had gone rapidly by since the meeting in the railway train. Summer was in its prime. On the outskirts of Newport the glorious sunshine (which perhaps played somewhat too warmly on narrow city streets or dusty country roads) was tempered by fresh breezes, which blew steadily landward. There, over the glittering waves, white-winged gulls were skimming; an occasional pleasure yacht or fishing-smack, gliding over the broad expanse of waters, gave life and variety to the scene, while the intense blue of the sea was equaled only by the cloudless azure above.

Two girls were walking down a narrow pathway leading from the cliffs to the beach. They were talking and laughing gayly, for the weather and scene were both exhilarating, and youth is quick to feel all outward influences. Besides, why should they not be happy—being young, pretty, beloved and loving?

The taller and darker of the two was attired in partial mourning; but the younger looked charming in a dainty costume of white serge, with a sailor hat resting on luxuriant braids of golden hair. The sea-breeze tinged her cheeks with unwonted color, and her eyes were luminous with hope and happiness.

In the atmosphere of love, Enid had ripened into beauty far surpassing the promise of her girlhood.

"Was I not right, Jessica, in persuading guardy to take Seaview Cottage? It is such a dear, romantic place, and I am never so happy as when looking out upon the sea."

"You are a fortunate girl to have every whim gratified. Mr. Ellerton seems never so happy as when ministering to your wishes. I wonder you can bring your mind to leave such a guardian even to marry Mr. Clifford."

"I am not going to be married for a long time yet."

"But in your case there is no reason for delay, and he tells me he is growing impatient. I do not care much for a long engagement; although as regards Charlie Denham and myself, it is far more prudent to wait until his uncle takes him into partnership."

Charles Denham was a nephew of the principal banker in Dalebury, and the accepted suitor of Jessica St. Aubyn, who had long overcome her girlish predilection for Basil Clifford.

"After all, Jess, we may be married on the same day. I do not think Basil will disregard my desire to defer our wedding at least some months longer."

She was not smiling now, and her voice bore traces of sadness. She was thinking how little her friend Jessica suspected she was urging on the second nuptials of a ten months' widow.

There would have been no happier woman in the world than Enid could she have forgotten the past. The rich old gentleman who had adopted her as his daughter esteemed no luxury as being too rare, no dress or ornament as being too expensive, if they could only afford her pleasure. By his request Jessica had been invited to reside with them as Enid's friend and companion, a desire which she was nothing loth to gratify, for owing to her mother's extravagance she had been left in rather straitened circumstances, and was very glad to find a home until Charlie was ready to begin house-keeping. The two girls, rid of Mrs. Ormesby's interference, lived harmoniously together, and were fast friends.

Then, to complete Enid's felicity, she received from Basil, soon after her return to Dalebury, an assurance that his heart was hers solely, and as he had never contemplated marrying any other woman, she alone could make him happy.

Mr. Ellerton approved the match; Enid her-

self was more than willing. It was only that grim secret which upreared its shadowy form across the course of "true love"—sometimes presenting the appearance of an insurmountable barrier, sometimes receding almost out of view in the golden mists of present happiness.

"There is Mr. Clifford on the lower ridge of rocks," said Jessica, suddenly. "I dare say he is hunting for the rare specimens of sea-weed you were wishing for yesterday. He sees us and waves his hand. No doubt," smiling archly, "it will not be long before he joins us."

Already was the young man leaping over the rocks toward them.

He too was staying at this fashionable watering-place, the attraction being in his case the society of his fair betrothed.

The young people walked and chatted together until they remembered dinner hour, and discovered that Mr. Ellerton would have reason to complain of their want of punctuality if they did not make great haste.

While they were returning up the path by which they had descended—a path so narrow that it allowed only two to walk abreast—Jessica, who knew from experience that a third party is not conducive to the happiness of lovers, tripped on lightly before them, and made her disappearance under the plea of disliking to be hurried while performing the important duties of the toilet.

Thus left alone together (Enid's small hand resting on his arm, her blue eyes upturned to his, and beaming with love and trust), Basil seized the opportunity of alluding to the subject he had so much at heart.

"Darling, when are we to take the vows which will bind us to tread life's path side by side?"

"Not yet, Basil—not yet."

"But why are you so obdurate, since you confess that you love me? Oh, Enid, it is sweet to know that I am the first you ever loved, and that when you are my wife I need not fear that the memories of some unfortunate rival will share your heart with me!"

A pallor crept over her face. It was true she never loved Bertrand Heathcote, yet she had been his wife; the ring he had placed on her finger was even now reposing in a secret drawer of her writing-desk, where she deposited it on the morning of her departure from Camden. If Basil knew all this, how his confidence would be shaken! Never could he forgive her, or take her to his heart again.

"We are very happy now," she faltered. "Why should we desire a change?"

"Because until the knot is tied that shall unite us forever we never can feel certain that some cruel blast of fate may not drive us far asunder. I cannot forget what I suffered when you were at school in New York. I fancied you would be carried off by some one, and be lost to me."

"But you see that your presentiment was unreasonable. I came back to you again."

"Ah, yes! if you had not I should have become a misanthrope, hating the whole human race, and envying those lovers who were more fortunate than I."

"Then it is fortunate I saved you from such a fate?"

She was trying to speak playfully, though every word he uttered gave a fresh sting to her already sorrow-punctured heart.

"It was indeed fortunate!" he answered, in a grave tone. "Nothing can be more sad than to see a man's whole life wrecked through a disappointment in love. He may battle against his trouble, perhaps succeed in hiding every outward token of regret, and mingle in scenes of pleasure, apparently the gayest of the gay. He may at times pose as a cynic and an uninterested spectator of the varied scenes which make or mar our lives. He may boast of his bachelor freedom, and affect to scoff at his much-married comrades. Yet, Enid, how deeply ought we to pity one who lives and dies yearning for, yet unknowing, the sweetness of domestic ties—who has never clasped to his heart as a wife the one fair creature who alone

in all the world was endowed with the power to make him happy.

"Well, dearest," he continued, after a short pause, "let us be grateful for the knowledge that our love will have a fortunate termination in matrimony. By the way, dearest, do you ever correspond with the lady who befriended you when—poor little waif!—you so sadly wanted a friend? You should write and tell her of your approaching marriage. Where is she living now? What is her name?"

Enid, with a hasty movement, withdrew her hand from his arm and walked on a little in advance.

"Do not let us speak of that time, Basil. The recollection of it is hateful! I suffered so much!"

"I have noticed, and so has Mr. Ellerton, how strongly you dislike talking upon the subject. After all, it is only very natural; still, if possible, I should have liked to be able to show my gratitude to this Mrs.—"

She perceived that he paused, as if to afford her an opportunity to supply the name.

"Mrs. John Smith," she answered, quickly. "I have lost her address. It was somewhere in West Philadelphia. You must not be vexed with me, Basil. I know it was stupid, but I was so flurried at the time we parted."

"Poor child!" he said, compassionately.

It was lucky he could not obtain a glimpse of her face at this moment.

They reached the cottage—a handsome, roomy residence, surrounded by gardens and pleasure-grounds, part of which extended to the beach. Mr. Ellerton only rented this place for the summer, while its owner was abroad. His permanent place of abode was to be at Clifford Hall. It would have seemed cruel to Basil to separate the old gentleman from his adopted child.

At dinner and during the evening Enid was feverishly gay. A red spot burned on either cheek, and her laughter rippled forth so merrily that none guessed the uneasiness she really felt. To love, and yet to deceive—to be trusted, and yet to repay that trust with treachery, are actions alike repulsive and contemptible to all.

So thought Enid, who began to perceive that to frankly confess her error and its consequent punishment, and not to betray the confidence of her lover, would have been a much wiser course to pursue.

All this time Mr. Ellerton, who was not gifted with much power of penetration, was rejoiced over her apparently high spirits.

"Why, child," he said, laying his feeble hand upon her golden head as she knelt beside him, "your gayety is quite infectious! I shall give you the name of 'Little Sunbeam,' for you shed light and cheerfulness everywhere around you!"

It was late when Basil rose to go. He was staying at one of the hotels, for he did not care to take up his quarters for an indefinite period with Mr. Ellerton.

The night was beautifully warm and fine. Only a passing cloud obscured the silver moon. The rich odor of many roses made the air heavy with perfume. The waves rippled on the sands with a soothing murmur.

Enid could see the liquid undulations gleaming in the moonlight as she stepped with her lover through one of the long French windows out upon the garden-path.

They lingered a little on their way, as lovers are apt to do; then the gate was reached, the last good-byes were said, and Enid, after watching the beloved and retreating form until it was long lost in the darkness, turned back toward the house.

"So I have found you at last, Mrs. Bertrand Heathcote! I hope it will be a pleasant surprise to you to discover that you are not a widow, after all."

The harsh, mocking, yet familiar voice issued from the shadows cast by a large elm tree, under which, upon a rustic garden-seat, a slouching, ill-clad figure half reclined in the in-

dolent fashion she remembered so well in connection with the man she believed to be dead and buried.

It was not the fear of a ghostly visitant or haunting specter that made her heart sink and her limbs tremble. She knew at once that her husband still lived, and that he had now come to claim her.

"The pleasure of finding me again seems almost too much for you, sweet Enid. Come and sit beside me; let us talk quietly over our affairs."

He put his arm around her waist, and drew her down upon the seat. Perhaps it was as well that he did so, as otherwise she might have fallen to the ground.

"She told me you were dead," moaned the unhappy girl.

"Who? My sister Penelope? Then she made a great mistake. You should not have believed her. In truth, my dear, after our little quarrel, I thought it wiser to keep out of the way for awhile, until all unpleasantness had blown over. When I returned, you had gone; and it is only lately that I discovered your good fortune in being the adopted child and the heiress of the wealthy Mr. Ellerton."

"That knowledge has brought you here tonight," she said, bitterly. "You deserted me because I was poor and friendless."

"My sweet girl, do not be hard upon your wedded lord, who desires a reconciliation, and will even forgive your unfaithfulness to his memory, as so recently evinced by the tender parting with Mr. Basil at the garden-gate."

"I know you now as you really are—the most base and contemptible of men!" she cried. "Penelope doubted whether I was legally your wife, and if I am not, any attempt to fetter me again will be useless."

"Be under no uneasiness upon that score. We were lawfully united in the bonds of matrimony. The certificate is in my possession, to be produced for instant inspection if any one dares to cast suspicion on the fact. I was careful to provide myself with the document, thinking that Mr. Ellerton and Basil Clifford would wish to see it before my claims were admitted."

She was beginning to gain some measure of her self-possession. To plead for mercy from this man would be to plead in vain, but she might appeal successfully to his self-interest.

"If you wish me to be turned penniless from Mr. Ellerton's door, without a chance of inheriting the least share of his wealth, you will abruptly proclaim our marriage," she said, ironically. "I do not know whether it would suit your finances to maintain a wife whose contempt for and hatred of her husband will be her only dowry."

He was about to speak when she silenced him with a gesture.

"You think, perhaps, that my guardian would accept you as the husband of his heiress—that under judicious management he might be induced to receive you into his favor. You are deceived, Bertrand Heathcote! Mr. Ellerton overheard, in the parlor at Budd street, a conversation between you and your sister which was never intended for his ears. He learned your designs against him, and was able to judge correctly of your character. No money of his will ever, with his sanction, benefit you; and if he should discover the deception which, to my shame, I have practiced upon him, he will destroy the will which he has made in my favor, and leave me to the misery and want which I deserve."

Bertrand thoughtfully stroked his mustache. It was possible her views might be correct.

"Perhaps he would pay me a handsome sum if I consent to keep out of the way," he said, meditatively. "You ought to have an immense influence over such a weak-minded old simpleton as he is, and be able to mold him to your pleasure, although he was sharp enough to 'spoil my little game,' he added, recollecting himself.

"You overrate my influence," observed

Enid, coldly, gaining courage from his perplexity.

"Look here, Enid," he recommenced, after a long pause, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the ground. "I am going to make a rational proposal. Sentiment and romance are not in my line, as you are aware. Now, I am regularly down upon my luck—never was worse off—so, on one condition, I will leave you in peace. Give me a written promise that three months hence you will pay me the sum of ten thousand dollars if I keep our mutual secret. With that paper in my pocket, and a few dollars for present necessities, I will set off for New York before this time to-morrow."

"Where am I to get the money, supposing I agree to your proposal?"

"From your guardian, I should think, or"—here he lifted his eyes to her for a brief scrutiny of her face—"from Mr. Clifford. Why should you not marry him, when I am out of the way, and, of course, be happy all your life after? As his wife, you will have plenty of money at your disposal, and then it would be worth your while to bestow a portion on me."

Enid had believed it impossible for Bertrand to descend to a lower depth in her estimation; yet now, when he made this shameless proposal, she felt that she had only imperfectly gauged the depravity of his vile nature.

"Thank you," she said, coolly. "I have no taste for committing bigamy; still less would I cause an honorable man to sink into the degraded condition of your slave and victim through my sin. I understand your aim clearly, and how skillfully you would work upon Basil's love for me and his regard for the honor of his name. Had you waited a little longer, we perhaps might have been in your power, but it is now my privilege and duty to save the man I love from sharing my own wretchedness and disgrace. Act as you please, Bertrand Heathcote; Mr. Clifford shall not be drawn into your toils through my wickedness. To-morrow I shall make him understand I cannot be his wife, and shall bid him farewell forever!"

He ground his teeth vindictively as he gazed at her, and saw that she meant every word that she uttered.

"I will break your spirit yet, my lady!" he muttered. "As you confess you are my wife," he continued, after a moment's pause, "I will assert a husband's authority. You must either return to my protection, or make it worth my while to leave you here. If you have no money, fetch me the diamonds which the old dolt that calls himself your guardian has given you."

"I would freely render up to you the mines of Golconda were they in my possession, if that would cause my being rid of you," she cried, passionately. "But you are wrong; I have no diamonds."

"Old Ellerton told me that his heiress should wear jewels which a duchess might envy. You are trifling with me, Enid. Beware! I am a desperate man, and will make you repent!"

"I have told the truth. The diamonds have not yet been through the jeweler's hands; they were intended by Mr. Ellerton as his gift when—"

"You married Basil Clifford I suppose?" interrupted Bertrand, as she paused. "As that ceremony is not likely ever to take place, I may as well have them myself."

"They are not mine to give away. Mr. Ellerton keeps them, with other valuables, in the turret-chamber and he alone has the key."

"Enid! Enid!" cried Jessica's voice, issuing from the direction of the house, "where are you? Mr. Ellerton says you will take cold if you loiter any longer in the night-air."

"I must go," murmured Enid, starting from the seat. "What would she think if she saw me here?"

"You must meet me here again at the same time to-morrow, or I will force my way into the house."

She broke away from his grasp, and hurried into the house, where her guardian received

her with mild expostulations on her imprudence. Jessica was more energetic in her reproaches.

"I expect, Enid, you will awaken with an influenza to-morrow. It was thoughtless of Basil to detain you when you were wearing such a thin dress, and you had no shawl. You are shivering, too, and your lips look quite blue. It cannot be so warm out of doors as I fancied."

Enid made no attempt at self-defense, though she thought Jessica looked at her rather suspiciously.

CHAPTER IX.

HIS LAST VENTURE.

It was yet early on the following day when Enid sat alone on the beach gazing listlessly upon the foam-crested waves that advanced and receded with a soothing murmur, and scattered gayly-tinted seaweed or glistening pebbles. How could she best break the news to Basil? What would he say? Above all, how would he bear this terrible downfall of his hopes—this cruel blow dealt by the hand he loved? These questions occupied her mind, and evoked no satisfactory answer.

But she must try to put aside, for that day at least, such depressing thoughts, and, like many others of her sex, wear a sunny smile to hide an aching heart. For it was Mr. Ellerton's birthday, and, at her own desire, a dinner, followed by *tableaux vivants*, was to celebrate the event.

How light-hearted she had been while the preparations were in progress; helping Jessica and the others to choose the scenes and plan the dresses; laughing sometimes at Basil's awkwardness as stage-manager and general superintendent of rehearsals. Surely the thundercloud which burst yesterday effaced that bright, happy Enid from the face of creation, leaving a dull listless shadow bearing her name.

"Enid, my darling," cried Basil, who unnoticed had made down to the beach and now stood beside her, "Jessica told me I should find you here. Are you not rather cruel to wander away alone, when every one at Seaview Cottage is in the highest state of excitement, and your opinion is required on many points connected with to-night's arrangements? Are you already tired out, love, that you look so grave?"

His light tone jarred upon her nerves. A lump rose in her throat which would not disperse. Then hot tears gushed forth.

"Dearest, are you ill? What has happened? Has any one vexed you?" he cried, in alarm and perplexity, as he took his seat beside her.

There would be no better opportunity for speaking without fear of interruption, and the impulse came over her to postpone no longer her confession.

"Basil, I am very miserable, for I must say that which you will find hard to forgive. Remember, dear, whatever pain may be inflicted by my words, it will recoil with tenfold power upon my own heart."

"I could forgive you anything—everything!" he replied, wonderingly. "But, darling, you have never wronged me; you are the personification of goodness and womanly sweetness. It cannot be"—struck by a sudden thought, while his face grew grave and anxious—"that you have ceased to love me?"

"I never loved you so dearly as at this moment, when I am about to say that I can never be your wife."

"You do not mean to say that you will break your promise?"

"I dare not keep it. It should never have been made."

"Enid!"

"Oh, do not look at me so reproachfully! It is not through caprice or unkindness that I tell you we must part, but because my mad folly in the past has placed a gulf between us."

"You must be dreaming, Enid, or laboring under some strange delusion. I have known

you from childhood. Your life has ever been pure and spotless."

He stopped abruptly, remembering Enid's flight from the school, which had always appeared rather a mysterious proceeding to her friends at Dalebury. The letter in which Madame Belleville announced the news arrived at Sunnymead on the day of Mrs. Ormesby's unexpected decease, and was subsequently burned with other useless papers before being read. Yet, although it was supposed that only a short time elapsed between her disappearance from that select establishment and her arrival at Dalebury accompanied by Mr. Ellerton, some spiteful rumors had been circulated.

Then, Basil Clifford scornfully rejected them as venomous calumnies unworthy the trouble of a refutation; now, they recurred to his memory.

"Tell me the worst at once, Enid," he said, almost harshly. "If you have deceived me my faith in woman is lost."

His stern demeanor gave her courage, for it was easier to endure his anger than the sight of a sorrow she could not soothe. With averted face she told her pitiful story. Basil heard her to the end in silence, though each broken sentence rent his heart-strings.

"Then you are the wife of this man—this Bertrand Heathcote?" he said, when she had finished. "Yet you would have met me at the altar with this secret in your soul?"

"I believed that he was dead. I often tried to muster courage to enable me to confess to you, but my heart failed me."

His stern look changed now into profound compassion.

"Enid, I love you so dearly that I cannot desert you. You will want a friend—a brother—to deal with this man, and to turn aside as well as may be his weapons of attack. No longer must I regard you as my betrothed, but I may still protect you as a sister."

He tried, though his efforts were not very successful, to inspire her with some degree of hope and cheerfulness, and they at last decided that all further discussion on the topic should be reserved until the day, with its long-anticipated festivities, was over.

They could neither bear to disappoint Mr. Ellerton, as he had been looking forward with almost childish pleasure to seeing his dear Enid the central and most-admired figure of the brilliant entertainment.

"Let us return to the house now," said Basil, at length. "To-day we must show the courage of endurance for his sake; to-morrow may show the necessity for action."

He pressed her hand, not with the lingering, caressing touch of a lover, but with the cordial clasp of a friend, and almost in silence they walked up the path leading to the mansion.

The drawing-room, glittering with light and gay with ladies' bright attire, rung with plaudits as the curtain disclosed each successive scene, mostly taken from Shakespeare's plays or Sir Walter Scott's novels, interspersed with an occasional tableau from some old fairy tale, to give lightness and variety to the entertainment.

Everybody agreed that Enid had never looked more lovely. Whether she wore the rich dress of *Amy Robsart*, or the Venetian costume of *Desdemona*, or the poor peasant dress of *Cinderella* waiting for her fairy-godmother, her beauty shone alike through each, and Mr. Ellerton rubbed his hands in unfeigned delight as his ears were greeted at every turn by praises of his adopted daughter.

Jessica made an attractive *Beatrice*, while Basil was a courtly *Earl of Leicester*; but though they had their share of admiration, the chief honors were reserved for Enid.

There was a pensive shade upon her countenance, but which only served to enhance her beauty, and if noticed at all by the spectators, was imagined to be assumed for the more perfect portrayal of the heroine she represented.

"Miss Lisle's ability is perfectly wonderful," said one lady to her friend. "She reveals none of the self-consciousness and difficulty in keep-

ing a composed countenance which usually marks attempts of this kind but thoroughly identifies herself with the character."

It was growing late, and the room was crowded to excess, for by Mr. Ellerton's orders the servants were allowed to assemble behind the seats upon which the guests were ranged, so that they might see the final tableau of *Cinderella* at the ball.

Enid, in an exquisite dress of some gauzy white material, spangled with silver, took her place in the front of the stage; and as the curtains drew slowly apart, found her eyes fixed upon a sea of faces.

Suddenly she saw, or thought she saw, among them the scowling visage of Bertrand Heathcote. It vanished immediately—so quickly that the thought occurred to her that her too vivid imagination had conjured up the person she most dreaded.

The momentary shock, however, caused her to lose her presence of mind. Her countenance changed, and the hand which had been so gracefully outstretched was pressed to her beating heart.

"She was over-tired—perfectly exhausted with excitement!" people said, as the crimson draperies closed hastily and hid her from their view.

At length all was over—the music, the compliments, the glare, the heat. Enid had received the congratulations and thanks of her friends with forced smiles, inwardly rejoicing when the last carriage drove away. She was soon at liberty to retire to her own chamber, weary both in body and mind. Yet she could not sleep, even when her maid had been dismissed, and the profound silence reigning over the house hinted that all its other inmates save herself were sunk in slumber. She was haunted by terrible thoughts, which she could not banish. Some misfortune was close at hand, involving those she held dear. Bertrand, in his fiendish malice, would wreak vengeance not only on her, but also on Basil or upon her guardian. Had she really seen him in the house that night, or was it an illusion? Even then a stealthy footstep seemed passing her door—a footstep that sounded familiar. Was that, too, only a fancy, or a strange reality?

Unable to banish these vague alarms, she arose, hastily threw on her dressing-gown, and looked out into the hall. The moon shed a pale, ghastly light through the window opposite, but there were dark shadows which her sight could not penetrate. She listened.

There was again the sound of some one moving about cautiously and deliberately, and her eyes becoming accustomed to the partial darkness, she discerned—

What was that? The figure of Bertrand Heathcote was surely gliding toward the room where Mr. Ellerton slept!

Then she had not been deceived when she thought she recognized her husband among the spectators of the last tableau.

She could not conceive for what purpose he had come, or why he was now alert and wakeful when others were sleeping; but as one would instinctively distrust a wild and savage animal, she felt certain he was a dangerous man, and that he must be watched.

She dared not raise an alarm—not so much from fear for her personal safety as from a desire to avoid the degradation she must endure if he claimed her before the assembled household as his wife, which he would doubtless do if driven to extremity.

Quietly, therefore, she followed him. She was afraid to venture too near him, lest he should hear her steps and turn upon her.

At last she saw a faint streak of light issuing through the crevice of the door, and she knew he had entered Mr. Ellerton's apartment.

She paused an instant, to nerve herself to meet the worst that could possibly happen. She now recollected having told Bertrand that the diamonds were kept in the turret-chamber, and she much repented of her folly. It was possible, she thought, he intended to secure the keys, of which her guardian always retained

possession, and to rob him of the jewels. At all risks she must prevent his purpose, or she would be an accomplice in his guilt. Bertrand had left the door open wide enough to admit her slender figure. She entered and stood at the threshold. There was her husband, bending over the bed with a cushion upraised in his hands, contemplating his unconscious victim ere he pressed it with stifling violence upon his face.

"Help! help!" shrieked Enid, wildly.

The unexpected sound startled the would-be assassin and awoke Mr. Ellerton.

The old man, who had passed a lifetime in half-civilized countries, where it behoved him to be incessantly on his guard against the attacks of desperadoes, had never once for fifty years slept without a loaded revolver within easy reach. Awakening suddenly, he snatched up the weapon, and presented it full in the intruder's face.

Bertrand was a coward, as most rogues are; and the sight of a loaded revolver, even in the feeble hand of Mr. Ellerton, and the cries for help which continued to echo through the room and corridor, struck terror to his soul.

Ignominiously he turned, and pushing aside his wife, while he uttered a fearful imprecation, fled toward the staircase.

Basil Clifford who slept in the house that night, had, with Charles Denham and several of the servants, been awakened by Enid's cries, and they came hastening from all directions.

Bertrand had no time for reflection. He might still have made his terms with those who loved Enid. A murderer at heart, he feared for his own paltry life, and his thoughts became merged into a wild desire to escape. While flying with the swiftness that fear gives, he missed his footing in the darkness, and fell headforemost down the long flight of marble steps.

Lights were speedily brought, and he was discovered lying insensible and motionless. His skull was severely fractured, and his left arm broken.

A surgeon was sent for, but long ere his arrival Bertrand Heathcote had expired, and Enid was indeed free!

No one ever exactly knew how the would-be robber managed to conceal himself in the house so as to elude observation. Doubtless he had found it easy to obtain an entrance among the crowd of visitors, many of whom were strangers, who passed to and fro in the house that evening. His principal design was to steal the diamonds, which he had always craved, and to attain that end he had provided himself with skeleton keys and other implements used by professional burglars. But he was seized with a sudden temptation when he discovered how easily he could gain access to old Ellerton's apartment.

At once he saw that he might gratify his spite against the man who had deceived him, and enrich himself for life. He would only have to wait until Enid secured her inheritance, when he should make himself its lawful possessor.

So the cruel resolve was taken. The aged sleeper was sure to prove an easy victim, and the would-be murderer dared to hope his crime might be ascribed to the visitation of apoplexy.

Who will regret that such hopes were fallacious, or that Enid arrived just in time to save that venerable life?

Some folks wondered why Enid's marriage with Mr. Clifford was being deferred so long, and some of them uttered all sorts of dismal prophecies because a year had glided away without any preparations being made for a bridal festivity.

But whatever people chose to imagine, no one save two persons knew the true reason, or suspected that the death of the stranger who slept in the quiet churchyard near the sea had had anything to do with the puzzling mystery.

Only Mr. Ellerton and Basil knew the history of Enid's error and bitter repentance; they only were aware that the man whom she had

prevented from committing the crime of murder was her husband.

She did not mourn him—who could?—but she forgave him, for no sensitive heart bears enmity against the dead. And although her widowhood was unknown to the world, she determined, with Basil's concurrence, to take no second vows until the fitting tribute of respect was paid, not to Bertrand, but to the promises once made at the altar, promises which she now felt had been too lightly uttered and never rightly fulfilled.

One lovely morning in early autumn, when the fields were yellow with ripened grain, and when nature wore the aspect of a bountiful mother lavishing good gifts upon mankind a gay procession drove up to the ivy-covered church, where there was solemnized a double marriage—Enid being at last united to her faithful lover, and Jessica and Charlie Denham forming the second happy pair.

Lionel Ellerton gave away the brides.

His wedding present to Enid was a parure of diamonds, set in the newest fashion by Tiffany.

We must leave Mr. and Mrs. Clifford to their domestic felicity, and turn to a different picture.

In the dreary garret of a tenement-house sits a gaunt, faded woman, whose hair is white as snow, although, judged by years, she is not old. It is Penelope Heathcote.

The night is far spent, but she stitches patiently on, for she cannot expect to taste food on the morrow unless that work is finished and carried to the factory, where her task will receive a scanty recompense. Weary and hopeless, she plies her needle, though her back aches and her eyes are dim.

Where is Walter Maxwell, that he comes not to the aid of this forlorn creature, struggling so feebly for a bare subsistence?

Alas for Penelope! her one friend has forsaken her! After Enid's departure from Budd street frequent quarrels arose between the betrothed pair. Penelope could not forgive her lover's persistent inquiries after Bertrand's young wife, or his almost openly-expressed disbelief in the disparaging tales by which she tried to deceive him.

For the first time, he discovered her violent temper, and understood her jealous, exacting disposition.

The process of disenchantment once begun, every meeting brought a new revelation, and almost before Penelope fully realized the danger which her own conduct had raised up, Maxwell transferred his affections to a younger and a fairer rival, who eventually became his wife.

As to Rosetta Marsden, through whose romantic folly Enid partly owed her misfortunes, she has long since left school, and has married.

It is noticeable with regard to this young lady, that since the consummation of the latter event she has lost all taste for match-making, and refers to love and lovers as "delusions of the youthful mind;" from which we may infer that her choice of a husband has not been unexceptionably fortunate.

All is therefore now told; and it only remains to be remarked, finally, that if Enid's error was great, it is now almost forgotten in the sunshine and happiness which illumines the path of her who committed such an error—Basil's devoted wife—old Ellerton's heiress.

THE END.

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